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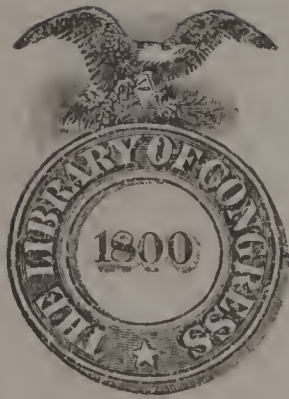
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# GOLD MINE





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*The Gold Mine*

# The Gold Mine

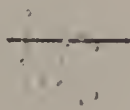
By

BETTY, *Wendell*

*Yonkers Betty*



Translated from Swedish



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## CHAPTER I.

### One of the "Quiet in the Land."

T was only half past six in the morning, and yet the sewing machine had buzzed for a whole hour, if not longer. True, it had now and then paused, as the pieces of cloth that were being sewed together escaped from beneath the presser-foot, but only to buzz on as before. And thus it went on up there in the corner room of the gray, delapidated house, day after day, week after week, year after year, in monotonous, unceasing toil.

The busy seamstress, who sat before the machine pale, rigid, and with impassive features, now and then cast a hurried glance out through the window, as if she longed for some interruption of the chain of thoughts or of the tiresome buzz of the machine—some new impression that might dispel the loneliness about her. But no! What she saw was exactly the same that every morning for many years had met her gaze. A gray, one story building to the left, with the facade toward the same courtyard at whose lower, southwest corner stood the old tumble-down structure where she had her home. And directly opposite this was a long row of low out-buildings with thin thatched roofs in the same melancholy, gray color as the two

dwelling houses. To the right below the fence was a rough piece of ground, covered with short grass—and low juniper bushes between the big boulders, and here and there hollows, in which the clayey water shone with a whitish tint. Yonder she could see old Swan, in his dingy white jacketsleeves, his soiled vest, and his shiny skin apron, come out of the shed with an armful of wood, just as usual, and old Stina, in coarse-checkered calico dress and red kerchief, emerged from the barn with a milk-bucket in each hand, exactly as she had come and limped up the path during all these years.

With a sigh the pale seamstress turned her gaze from the window to look again at the seam, which she carefully examined, after which she again put the flywheel in motion.

Everybody in the neighborhood knew that Dressmaking Judith was a clever, conscientious and punctual seamstress, who was never guilty of any dishonesty and never promised to have any work ready before she was sure of being able to make good her promise. But who thought for a moment this unrelenting, soul-killing work could, as it actually seemed to her, smother her personal self, ravage the garden of her soul and convert her into a machine?

Judith had arrived at the age which generally defies guessing, but which is commonly styled that of the old maid. Her hair was as rich and dark as in her young days, and no wrinkles could yet

be detected on her fine forehead. But the changeless sallow complexion, the colorless, firmly closed lips, which were seldom beautiful with a smile, and the flabby cheeks, which had lost the plumpness of youth, showed that she had passed the line that divides youth from middle age. For her youthful dreams and hilarity were forever gone. It was dreary not to have anyone to live and work for, now that her mother, for whose sake she had sacrificed that which once stood alluringly before her and offered itself to her as the happiness of her life, had departed from her to the land from which no one returns. Since that time it appeared to her that she was only living half a life.

It often seemed to her so meaningless that she should year after year be compelled to continue the struggle for her own unprofitable existence. Even if people were kind and courteous to her, yet no one loved her. And even though she esteemed many of them, for none of them could she feel that sympathy which might have filled the aching void in her heart. What was her life but a continual round of cutting, stitching, trying on and treading on the machine six days in the week till far into the night, with one day of lonely, uninteresting rest? Was it a defect in her Christian life, or a result of her solitary life or natural bent? At any rate, she felt as just one too many among her associates, weary, down-hearted, and forsaken.

She laid her work aside and went to start a

fire in the stove. Then she put the coffee-pot, which always had a bright side to show, on the fire, and while she waited for the water to boil she went about in the rather large room, polishing, arranging, and dusting, in order that everything might look neat. Indeed, not a little skill was required to produce anything like good cheer in a room like this. The floor was exceedingly rough and broken up, but Judith had covered up its defects by means of tastefully banded rag carpets. The roof sagged perilously over her head, and the rafters were so rotten that they seemed ready to break and bury her beneath the blackened tiles with which the house was roofed. But Judith had carefully whitewashed it with chalk, and at least made it seem capable of holding out yet for a time. The walls were rough and buckled, but Judith had covered the worst spots with light and pretty, though cheap, wall paper, and the many large and small pictures were arranged with a taste that was simply surprising. The only window in the room, with its twelve little green panes, was as clean and clear as two painstaking womanly hands could make it, and the long curtains, which were attached to a wooden shelf just beneath the roof, were gracefully draped in front of a couple of well cared for ornamental pot plants. The oldfashioned clumsy fire place was shining white and provided with shelf-strip and a few little ornaments on the frieze, which seemed to say: "Here we stand, that we may from



our little corner scatter a little beauty and loveliness over that which is in itself ugly and clumsy." On the tall commode with the mirror stood pretty vases with autumn flowers that were still fresh and bright, and on the neatly made bed was spread a snow-white home-crocheted coverlet. In this way the uninviting apartment had acquired a look of neatness and cheeriness which was quite unexpected for one who, for the first time, crawled up the squeaky stairs and, guided by the light from a little opening near the roof, made his way across the gloomy, ghostly attic into the room. The old house in "bottle-case" style had for ages served as dwelling-house to the owners of the Hedeberga estate but in its decrepit old age been exchanged for the new dwelling yonder, which was built in the later popular style with only one story on a larger lot and with tall windows and a modest verandah, but which had already had time to exhibit as gray walls and as darkened roof-tiles as the former.

Now the old wreck stood there like a ghostly apparition from olden times with its empty or boarded-up window-opening, its loosened siding, yellow with wall-moss, its slanting door, and a chimney that resembled a rock-pile. And it was like a glimmer of sunshine amidst gray autumn clouds to see Judith's clean little window, with its white curtains and blooming pot-plants, gently looking down on the plot below, overgrown as it was with bardock, nettles, and weeds.

The clatter of horses' hoofs and the rattle of wagon wheels was heard from the side of the house, where the drive-way to the place led through a broad gate of unpainted slabs.

Judith went to the window and drew the curtain aside. Yonder there had been carried out beds and wooden couches, large, wide extension tables and straight-backed chairs, cupboards and commodes, "besides other things, too numerous to mention." A spry little woman, quick in her motions and with a kind old face, directed a number of listening draymen how best to place the articles on the wagons so that there would be room for all.

And a tremendous stir there was. Grain sacks, flour barrels, bread boxes, meat-tubs and hams were being carried down from the provision-room. The cattle were loosed and led from the barn, lowing loudly in both high and deep tones. Men, women, and boys ran helter-skelter, as it seemed, in wild disorder; yet they had, no doubt, each his duty to perform.

Judith remained standing by the window until a couple of tears slowly ran down her cheeks. Her heart was oppressed with a feeling of painful forsakenness. Father Swan and Mother Britta, who felt that they were aged, found it all too burdensome to manage the big estate and therefore had sold it and bought a little place further off in the parish where they could live more quietly and at ease.



Their wedded life had been childless, and there was none of kin who could take over the estate; hence it had been sold to people from a distant locality.

It was sad for Judith, for, as the years went by, she had actually come to like her old-fashioned, honorable landlord and landlady. Old Swan, with his blunt, droll manner, had often enough succeeded in drawing a half smile from the lips of his sober tenant, and ever and anon he would trudge up the steep stairs with an armful of small kindling as a present to her.

And Mother Britta—oh, now Judith felt that she would miss the dear old lady in good earnest, notwithstanding that in their views on religion they never could agree. The old couple were both Christians, but of a strictly conservative coloring, whereas Judith to their constant surprise and pity exhibited more liberal views and was in error in their judgment. Hence there could be no full sympathy between them, although they were and felt one in spirit. Judith merely smiled at Swan's lengthy reasonings, as he sat and scratched himself behind the ear and deprecated the new-fangled faith which the "spirit circles" of the new age had gotten up. She did likewise when Mother Britta, the active little woman with a single tooth, uttered long tirades against "disregard for church and minister and against clandestine preachers that entirely spoil the people" etc.

Now she felt sorry to see the old couple's belongings loaded on carts and wagons to be transported several miles away. It affected Judith more than she had supposed it would. The old lady had not only remembered the lonely, overworked girl with fresh biscuits, fresh meat at slaughtering-time, milk, potatoes, and other good things out of pantry and barn, but she had also shown her a heartfelt and genuine kindness, which could be nothing else than a fruit of Christ's love.

The rent for the little room had also in her behalf been reduced to the lowest possible amount. The old couple had also secured from the new owners the right for her to continually occupy her apartment for the same rent—but alas, how long? What kind of people were they, her new landlord and family? When Judith once asked Mother Britta regarding this, the old lady shook her gray head, and her usually cheerful face assumed a serious look, which made Judith uneasy and deprived her of the desire to hear more.

That they were a middle-aged couple, with a large flock of children, she had long known; but, to tell the truth, this brought her little joy, for what more unpleasant or enervating could be imagined than a flock of unruly youngsters with their meanness, noise, quarrels and mischief?

But she must hurry and put on that blouse with the delicate cream-colored trimmings that looked so becoming, for she must have her old friends with

her for a cup of good coffee before they seated themselves in the sulky and disappeared for the last time through the large gate. Oh! And it was already past nine o'clock.

A snowwhite table cloth was hurriedly spread on the little round table in front of the sofa. Three pairs of dainty cups and saucers, a little polished sugar bowl, and a cream pitcher of red glass were arranged about a glass tray with coffee-bread. When the coffee-table was in readiness, Judith took her simple every-day hat from the hook in the door post and hastened down the stairs.

Mother Britta was hurrying to and fro between the loads of moving-goods, and Swan was just tying the wash tub and the water tank to one of the wagons, when Judith in her unobtrusive way asked if they would be pleased to drink a parting cup with her.

"Oh! So you have a parting cup for us, little girl! Have you forgotten, that both Mother and I have quit drinking coffee?" asked Father Swan in a tone so unflinchingly serious, that his words might have been taken in good earnest if the rogue had not peeped out when he winked with his gray eyes, as he generally did when there lay another meaning under his words.

A forced smile passed over Judith's face, but to-day she was all too sad to allow Father Swan's humor to affect her.

"Father Swan, you will please come, won't you?"

Mother Britta, let Lars tie the bed clothes down alone. They lie as securely as if they were grown fast. Come now!"

After a while she had succeeded in getting the old couple with her up. Persistence wins, and the coffee tasted fine in the autumn cold.

"I can't understand, how you've managed to make it so elegant up here in Mother's old treasury, child! People must live like lords these days, whether they can afford it or not."

"You see, Father Swan, I have to live like a lord because I can't afford to live like a peasant," replied Judith, as imperturbably serious as he.

Finally the parting moment arrived:

"God be with you, my little child! Be true to the word of God and His church, and you will not be without shelter when the last day comes," said Father Swan, as he extended his withered hand to the lonely woman.

"Thanks, Father Swan! And you be true to Him who says: "The stranger they do not follow but flee from him, for the sheep hear not the voice of the stranger, as you know," replied Judith and warmly pressed the old man's hand.

But when the old couple immediately after dinner seated themselves in the sulky and nodded their last farewell to her up in her little window, Judith wept aloud, so that she had to remove the pretty blouse, for fear the cream-colored satin would be stained by her tears of sorrow.



Now she was alone—ah, how terribly alone! But, Jesus had said: “Lo, I am with you always!” Then, He also was with her on this sorrowful moving day . . .

Now followed days and nights during which Judith, in spite of her faith and trust in God, often felt afraid, not exactly afraid of ghosts, but still something of that nature, afraid of the great emptiness and solitude that seemed to want to swallow her up from every direction.

Not a living being besides herself was to be found on the forsaken premises, with the exception of the rats, which in throngs took possession of the old house and now felt themselves masters of the place. But lo and behold! Had they not forgotten the poor cat, the good, friendly Whitis, who quite frequently had been wont to visit the quiet retreat on Judith’s clean mantelpiece. How lonesome and bewildered he looks as he stands and gazes about with great, melancholy eyes, as if he expected that some one of the household should appear and admit him to the barred house!

Judith opened the window and called caressingly: “Whitis, Pussy dear!”

Whitis looked around in surprise, and when he discovered a human being, and, what was more, a good friend, he set up a little glad mewing and went like a shuttle into the entry and never stopped till he was within Judith’s domain, where by circling around her and continually mewing as he brushed

her dress he seemed to want to tell her how glad he was to find a being of flesh and blood on the desolate place.

Judith no longer felt so hideously lonely, although many a time a shudder passed through her when during the dark evenings and nights she heard the many mysterious, unaccountable sounds that always are heard in old houses, and which frequently give rise to the various ghost stories that are in circulation. The empty dwelling house with its bare, staring window, the empty barn, whence no lowing emanated into the still morning—all gave her the impression that neither she nor her surroundings anymore pertained to the land of the living, until finally one morning she awoke at the sound of human voices. On raising the window shade she saw over the fog, which heavy and moisture-laden hugged the ground, a ladder raised against the wall of the house, and, on the ladder, a man who had already left a large red spot on the wall as proof of his vocational skill.

Lo, there another man's head and a hand with a brush emerged out of the mist, and there a third one made his appearance. It was plain that the greatest dispatch had been ordered, and pretty soon the gray color had given place to a warm red, which gave the old dwelling a cheery, youthful look.

Ere long all the buildings stood in red festive attire and looked surprised at each other's finery—all except the old dilapidated structure where Ju-




dith lived. It stood there gray and forgotten like some aged person who once had been young and useful but now in his old age had lost all significance and was completely ignored. Such is the way of the world.

Then the foundation was plastered, fences were repaired, fallen gates were again mounted on their hinges. The rooms were prepared and the doors were painted, the floors were scrubbed, and all that conveyed an impression of ugliness was removed. How the whole place of a sudden took on a different look—a stamp of order, comfort and beauty! But the dear old Christian couple were away—and what kind of people were the future occupants of this home, when everything was done for external appearance, whereas formerly the genuine virtues, piety and contentment, had been the fairest ornaments of the home. Judith fancied that in the fate of her forsaken, despised abode she saw her own.

## CHAPTER II

### The Newcomers

 FORTNIGHT after the old couple's departure the new occupants arrived. That they were genuine up-to-date people, who intended to bring a new era with them into the new home, was evident. Handsome furniture and fixtures arrived, load after load. The picket-gate at the corner slammed incessantly, so that the old dwelling seemed to shake on its foundations. Again there was heard the lowing of cows and the bleating of sheep from the out-buildings, and life, which like a frozen river had congealed and lain in a torpor, had resumed its course but in newer, richer forms.

A beaming September sun poured light and warmth over the lawn, where such old-fashioned flowers as poppies, marigold, hollyhock and autumn lilacs served to give life and color to the scene. A little troop of busy people were hurrying out and in with the goods. Pretty soon lovely curtains draped the windows, and between them could be seen pot plants in bloom.

It was no easy matter to work to-day. The hands would not obey, and no wonder, for the work-master, the will, had grown laggard. But all the

more briskly went the work in the work-shop of thought. Why could she not be composed as usual and refrain from wondering and making comparisons?

She saw before her a picture of earthly comfort and joy that made her lonely existence all the more joyless. She felt wearier than usual, and even poorer; there was hardly a bit of bread in the little cupboard, which not infrequently contained nothing but its perfect neatness and its pretty shelf-paper. And yet it often happened that her customers, especially the wealthy country misses and their mamas, gave her to understand that she was exorbitantly high priced, and then, at their insistent and unreasonable protest, she had to put down her wages till she received hardly more than half pay for her work. What did these well-to-do people know about hardships and privations, or how could they know what a poor seamstress must endure who in the first place wants to be as good as her word, and in the second place needs something besides air to live on? She could not help, that all this, which she generally took philosophically enough, now seemed unspeakably bitter to her.

Down at the neighbor's the busy life increased. It must be the lady of the home herself who had begun to pack up porcelain and glassware from a newly arrived load. She looks rather young to have so many youngsters. A whole troop of them

run busily back and forth between the loads and receive things to be carried into the house. How could the mother dare to leave such fragile things in the hands of that set of thoughtless youngsters? But they do not all look unruly and they carry the things as cautiously as if they were grown up people. One-two-three of them were nearly of the same size.

A tall girl of some fifteen summers has come to help mama by picking up the things and handing them out to the little busy brownies. She resembles her mother somewhat, has soft womanly features, and light hair, which she wears combed over the crown of her head and united in a long braid hanging down her back. But how pale she is! She must not be in the best of health...

But where did that one come from—she, who approaches with the nimbleness of a squirrel, takes hold of her mother and points with one hand toward the house? How the whole scene gains life and color from this healthy young creature—the very picture of health and energy. There is sunshine in those free, tumbling ringlets which plainly enough do not owe their soft winding ways to the curling-iron; there is sunshine in the blue eyes—and in the bright smile that makes her look like the principal figure in this living picture. See what beautiful teeth she has and how glad she looks when she smiles like that... She



may be the oldest daughter in the family. How happy she must be . . . !

Judith had allowed her work to fall on her lap. She was paler than usual. The sight of the glad, active familygroup down in the yard had not exhilarated her. What was the matter with her? She had felt such a queer sting in her bosom! What was this new feeling that took possession of her—a feeling of shrinking together more and more till she felt as one too much in God's great world.

Something similar she had felt before, but there was added something new—a hitherto unknown element within her which made the horizon darker than usual. Was it envy? Or was it not rather her old dream that had taken on a new form—this hitherto unfulfilled desire for some creature to love with the whole depth of her nature, and who could love her in return?

Why should this befall her now? Was she not loved by God? Was she not permitted to love God with all her heart? Was not His grace sufficient for her? What if she was possessed of a happiness even greater than those eager, restless human beings that rushed by one another down there, busy with the moving goods! What more did she want? Did she want to exchange her poverty for their wealth, if her eternal treasures thereby should be diminished? Did she want to exchange her ripe age with its experience of forgiveness of sins and peace of soul for youth and beauty?

"Teach me, ye woods, to wither glad  
And think, when autumn makes me sad:  
A glorious spring is coming,"

she sighed, and resumed her work, but only to let it fall again, while her glance strayed out through the window.

Now the young, curly-haired girl puts her hand over her eyes and looks up toward Judith's window. Then she points that way and says something to her mother—something that brought a smile to the face of both. Were they talking about her? Did they know that there was a crabbed old seamstress that dwelt in this forsaken habitation, "like an owl among ruins," widely separated from the world in which they lived? Or did they smile at her as a fool, a poor meeting-goer who was unfit to associate with them?

"Happy am I, happy am I,  
Though my earthly wealth be small."

So she wanted to feel, but she could only hum, and it did not surprise her much that it sounded as if she were singing the opposite. What she felt was of a different nature; that she did not want to sing.

She saw herself overworked, pale and hollow-eyed, with unmistakable signs of a vanishing youth, and in contrast there was the beaming girl with the fire of youth in her eyes and roses on her cheeks, Her present life was an all but powerless struggle with poverty, with waning health and strength, a



purse that was often empty, and the strictest economy in order to make both ends meet. In contrast to this her new hosts, healthy, strong, active people, who had an abundance of all that makes life pleasant. What contrasts!

Something woke her up from the melancholy comparisons, and that was Whitis, who sat outside the door and asked to be let in. He had seen how a little newly-arrived pussy-miss had been fed a cup of fresh milk on the verandah. But as a well bred pussy he could not offer to keep her company, but instead hurried up to his home, where he could without embarrassment tell how hungry he was.

"Poor Whitis, you don't know how poor your landlady is to-day!" sighed Judith and stroked his fine fur, which resembled an ermine mantle. "There isn't a white drop in the tin can, and I can not as yet go down and ask to get a pint a day, as with the old couple."

But wait! Whitis had been forced to learn to be content with a poor woman's fare since he moved to Judith, and he could drink his coffee with a little sugar and milk and soaked bread with as good relish as if it had been pure milk. Judith hastily made fire in the stove and put on the coffee pot. There was still a bit of cream in the cream pitcher, and she had bread, although it was dry. "Poor Whitis, how hungry you must have been!" But Judith said nothing about herself.

Suddenly she started. A knock compelled her

to hastily finish her breakfast and put away the dishes after the meager repast, but Whitis would not be troubled.

At Judith's "Come in!" the door opened, and it was as if a flood of sunlight had streamed in from the dark attic.

The young girl from the yard below—she of the sunbeams—entered the room and quietly placed a basket in the corner by the stove, after which she approached the bewildered seamstress and said in her frank way:

"I am Gunnel, daughter of Ivarsons down there. Mama asks if Madam will be kind enough to drink coffee with us this evening after we have got something like order in the house. Now everything is as if it had been stirred with a stick, but we are many hands, and we are bound to get something done."

She took Judith's slender, chilly hands between her soft and warm ones and gently squeezed them.

"Many thanks! I hardly thought you knew about me. But—I am no Madam—only 'Dress-maker-Judith.' "

"Judith! That is quite an uncommon name, and pretty too. Oh, but see what a pretty cat! It must be the same that was down there and played with our Vega. What in all the world—does he drink coffee?"

Judith stroked his back but did not answer at once.

"Whitis is eating his breakfast now. He like myself is fond of coffee," she said with a forced smile.

"Doesn't he drink milk?"

"Oh yes—of course—but he eats—anything . . .," and she nearly added, "that he can get," but she suddenly checked herself.

Gunnel looked first at the slender seamstress, then at the white cat that eagerly licked the sides of the saucer, and then all at once she understood.

"I will go down after some fresh milk, and then we will see if he doesn't like that better. He might get nervous from drinking too much coffee," she added with a contagious, merry laugh.

Judith had no time to answer, before the girl darted like an arrow down the stairs, but she had all kinds of trouble to keep the cat from the basket which Gunnel had set down, to which an invisible magnet seemed to draw him, while he looked at his mistress, mewing pitifully.

In a few moments Gunnel came back with a large can filled with morning milk, of which Whitis to his great delight received the saucer full. The rest was poured into Judith's bright little milk pan and put in the cupboard.

Judith in bewilderment expressed her thanks.

While she poured out the milk and rinsed the can, Gunnel looked about in the room.

"How cozy it is here! One would hardly imagine it when looking at the outside. How you have

been able to change an old shanty like this into a nice sitting-room is more than I can comprehend. And there is my verse—'For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us who are saved it is the power of God'."

"It that so? Are you, Gunnel, a child of God?"

"Yes—and you, Judith?"

"For ten years."

"Then we are sisters."

Judith's eyes shown with joyous surprise. This was something unusual for her.

"It will be fine to tell father and mother about this! You see, Judith, at home in Sandum we were a lot of Christians, and here, they tell us, there are none. We are as proud of you as if we had discovered a gold mine on the premises."

Judith smiled at the idea of the gold mine.

"We expect to see you this evening. Take the cat along with you, and Vega will have some fun. And, please, Mamma asks you not to be offended because she sends you a little roll and something just for food." The girl opened the basket and took out a puffy roll, which still smelt fresh, a piece of fresh mutton, eggs, and a lump of butter on a dish.

Judith was overcome.


"Dear Gunnel, what are you thinking of? You didn't know what kind of a queer personage you had up here in his old haunt of ghosts," she said at last between weeping and laughing.

"We guessed that you were a creature composed of flesh and blood, and subject to the same wants as other human beings. And now they will find out that you have also a spirit that puts you in relationship with us," replied Gunnel warmly. "Don't wait longer than till four!" And with these words she was gone.



## CHAPTER III.

### A New World

✧ ✧ ✧ ✧ T four o'clock Judith was ready to go  
✧  ✧ down to her new hosts. Was it the care-  
✧ ✧ ✧ ✧ worn Judith who stood before the mir-  
✧ ✧ ✧ ✧ ror and adjusted the black brooch in her  
waist? She had found herself too ordinary in her  
homely blue-streaked calico dress, so she had now  
donned her dark blue skirt and light-colored waist.  
In addition the significance of the hour had given  
another expression to her face than the usual down-  
cast one. She thought herself that she was much  
younger than yesterday.

"Come now, Whitis, you are invited too."

In the yard they were met by Gunnel.

Nimble and full of high-spirits, she had come  
running to embrace Judith.

"How nicely you are dressed up! Now you look  
just as young as I."

"Don't pretend that an old toby is a kitten,"  
replied Judith with a smile.

She felt more than she saw, that she was old;  
yet it pleased her that Gunnel did not find her too  
old to keep her company.

On the veranda stood Mother Ivarsson with a  
cordial welcome on her lips. "Here is our gold  
mine," said Gunnel in her bright, sunny way.



"Don't say that, Gunnel," said Judith with a sigh.

"Yes, I say it—though not much of the gold has been brought to light yet," insisted the girl in a decided manner.

"What if there be more dross than gold?"

"There is always dross in gold ore but it goes away in the refining—haven't you felt that at times? The Refiner knows what to do about that..."

Judith did not clearly grasp the meaning of what the girl said, but she could not forget her words.

It was a lovely autumn evening with mild, pleasant air. The sun poured a flood of golden light over the glowing splendor of the leafy trees. Beyond the dwelling house lay the orchard, where the old knotted apple trees stood bending beneath the burden of ripening fruit and reminded one of decrepit old men who have gotten too much to carry on their backs. Between leafy eminences and fields of grain the lake peeped forth, "blue as an angel's eye." All seemed so harmonious and country-like, excepting the old gray structure below the main building, Judith's home.

"That old building yonder ought to be taken away, just as —."

Judith did not complete the sentence.

She was about to relapse into her melancholy mood but was prevented by Gunnel's merry laugh.

"I know what you mean to say, Judith. I know you, although our acquaintance is only a couple of hours old. There are some people we can see clear through the first time, and you are of that kind. That old thing will soon be removed, says Father, but its only inhabitant is going to be built up afresh on our most holy faith and become a glorious temple, dedicated to the service of the Lord."

"You seem to have big thoughts of both me and yourself, Gunnel. Is it you that are going to be the builder then?"

"Ye are God's building, says the Scripture, and we are God's fellow-workers. He is Himself the architect. I am only to aid in picking away some of the old material..."

"Never mind Gunnel, Miss Judith. She always talks sort of 'mystically,' as Father says. Please come in, and we will bring in the coffee."

It was an entirely new home where Judith entered. She scarcely knew the old sitting room. Mother Britta had kept her house clean and orderly, and a breath of peace had ayways met Judith at the door, she thought; but everything was simple to the last degree and after the style of the old world, as Mother Britta herself said. But here the new era with its conveniences and its higher standards had entered with light and comfort. The windows in the room were draped with cream colored curtains, decorated with simple embroidery

and broad crocheted lace, and on the walls hung great pictures in gilt frames. But the open fire place was the same, and all thought with glad anticipation of the beautiful fires that were to enliven the big room during the long winter evenings.

From a large glass painting in a frame the stranger on entering was greeted with these words:

"I and my house, we will serve the Lord."

The coffee table was spread and handsomely decorated with an enormous bouquet of fine autumn flowers from the former home. The whole room was scented with sweet mignonette and sweet peas. Gunnel acted the hostess and compelled Judith to take her place in the sofa right between Mother Tilda and old grandmother. The slender, pale Nanna, quiet and pensive like a moon-lit night in August in contrast with her elder sister, who was the sunny June morning, seated herself at the front side of the table, where chairs were placed in readiness for Father and Gunnel.

It was real coffee this, clear and delicious, with good, home baked coffee bread and thick cream, quite different from the nearly colorless decoction which with dry bread had served as breakfast for Judith.

During the serving of the coffee Ivarson himself entered. He was a powerfully built, broad-shouldered man, with curly hair and a smile that clearly showed whence Gunnel had gotten hers. He gave the deeply courtesying guest a warm hand-

shake which showed that he already knew "what manner of spirit she was of."

How good she felt in this family circle, where the warmest love and sympathy seemed to rule, from the old gray haired grandmother to the little Ivar, who toddled along on his chubby, two-year-old legs. The six-year old Lydia was much taken up with Whitis and Vega and was particularly amused with the success she had in serving coffee and bread to the pretty white cat, a thing that would not go at all with the whimsical Vega. The elder sons, Yngve and Björn, herded the cows on Myrvallen, and their shouts and boyish laughter could be heard through the windows.

"How do you like the place, Mr. Ivarsson?" inquired Judith.

"I think we will like it all right when we get settled down," he replied. "But it is sad that, as they tell us, there are not many around here who are believers, neither is there any meeting-house here, according to what I have heard. I suppose it is far between the times when there is any preaching in the neighborhood, or how is it, Miss Judith?"

"Don't call me Miss Judith! It sounds like a nickname. Just call me Judith, 'Dressmaker' Judith."

"Oh yes, but the surname?"

Judith colored.



"There is no need of any surname; say simply Judith."

"But at any rate you do not look like a common peasant girl. There is something refined about you that assures one..."

"Oh, far from it! But your daughters look a good deal more refined," replied Judith in some bewilderment.

"My girls are as honorable as peasant girls ought to be, but there are no particularly refined manners about them."

Gunnel laughed, but Nanna shrugged her shoulders a trifle, without changing a muscle in her face.

"Nor me!" replied Judith.

"But you are not a peasant girl; anybody can see that," insisted the head of the family.

"I was born in G. I moved here when I was twenty and some years—so it seems to me city airs ought to have disappeared by this time."

"Yes—it is peculiar about this, but nevertheless one can see that you have not come of a peasant family."

"You got away from the subject, Father," interrupted Gunnel, who saw that the conversation was painful to Judith.

"Oh, not a great deal. I have it in mind just the same."

"It was I who talked away the subject," said the pale seamstress apologetically. "It is seldom a preacher straggles as far as to this place. And if

it ever happens it is no easy matter for him to get a half for a prayer meeting—and then to get away safe and sound. This is a fearfully dark place.”

“I suppose you have a sewing circle at any rate?” ventured Gunnel.

“I should say not! Who would go there?”

“You don’t say! Are there no Christians here at all?”

“A few. But we live so far apart.”

“Don’t you know of any girls or wives, who are believers and would be willing to devote some of their time to work for the Lord?”

“The commissioner’s wife in Markerud, but she lives five miles from here, and two girls from Skuggvik. Also Major Hägerborg’s housekeeper and dairywoman. But they would scarcely be permitted to take part in anything like that.”

“Skuggvik? Isn’t that the manor that lies to the west by the lake?” asked Ivarsson. “That must be a large place.”

“Yes, there are a lot of people but no believers except the two girls I mentioned.”

“Are they really converted and godly?”

“Without any doubt. There is also a poor girl Maja Lisa at Sörknatten, who is perhaps the foremost, because she is one of the last.”

“How so? What do you mean?”

“She is poorly gifted intellectually, but all the richer with regards to the heart and the spirit. She is my best friend.”

"How gratifying, Judith! Then we are already seven or eight, and that is not so little, to begin with, and soon we will be more. Let us start a sewing circle, you and I, Judith," said Gunnel caressingly. "Hasn't the commissioner's wife a horse, so that she can drive over here once in a while? And the girls at the manor..."

"It's of no use to figure on them. How would they dare to ask for anything like that, and when would they find time?"

"At home in Sandum the maids at a manor had one afternoon each in the week to employ as they thought best. Have they not the same privilege here?"

"I believe it is that way here too. But if the two are free at the same time is uncertain."

"But they can no doubt obtain the favor. Do you know, Judith, we shall make an attempt to pull them out of the shade and let the sun shine on them—the sun of Christ's love—so they can feel how sweet it is to do something for Him. We will start a sewing circle here next week, and you shall be the leader."

"Yes, that plan would be more than good, if it were only possible," sighed Judith, "but to make me the leader will never do. It might happen that I just that evening could be absolutely prevented from being at hand—for you must know that it is my customers and not I that command my time.

And as far the Skuggvik girls, I dare not entertain any great plans concerning them."

"You see they will all have to give in. We will command in the name of the Lord and operate as regular field marshals. No one gains anything who does not venture anything. If the girls have a will, they will dare a struggle with obstacles of whatever kind they may be, whether they come from superiors or comrades. You ask them to come here Sunday afternoon, then we will tell them of our plans. Shall we not?"

It was in her gentle, playful manner that the young girl sought to interest her new acquaintance for a work which she had not even thought of and which she did not regard as practicable; but she felt that she stood under an influence which she could not escape.

"I suppose we shall have to try," she said and smiled at Gunnel's smiling face.

The latter seated herself again, and her somewhat excited look gave place to the usual calm expression.

During the whole conversation Nanna had not uttered a word. Quiet and inaccessible she evinced not the slightest interest in the subject which was discussed with such ardor, and her large grayish eyes were never once fixed on any of the conversers but immovably directed forward with an almost clairvoyant expression.

What lay in this gaze? What occupied her



thoughts as she sat dumb and pale as a statue in the midst of these interested faces and this brisk interchange of ideas?

Judith could not help wondering. It seemed as if the girl's persistent silence had spoken louder to her than the words of the others and the glazed look in these large, quiet eyes had almost a magical effect on her impressive mind.

These eyes—they were only seemingly calm. There lay something in their depths—something unexplored as a riddle. Of this Judith was fully convinced.

How unlike the other children! Sound, strong, and blooming they all gave evidence of an inexhaustible supply of good humor and energy, for which the young girl did not seem to have the slightest affinity.

"Isn't Nanna feeling well?" Judith finally asked in an attempt to break the spell.

The girl shrugged her shoulders and replied mechanically: "Oh yes, tolerably," without altering look or posture.

"My poor little paleface! She has never been quite as strong as the others. But she will be, the doctor has assured us," remarked Ivarsson, laying his arm across her shoulder and gazing into her eyes. The girl's expression of countenance remained unchanged.

Just then the door was hastily opened by one of the boys, who handed a letter to the silent sister.

She opened the letter with the same indifferent air and glanced through it, at the same time placing a medical prescription beside her coffee cup.

"What does the doctor say?" asked her mother, after a fruitless attempt to guess the nature of the contents by the girl's expression of countenance.

"That I must go out and take exercise," was the curt reply.

"Doesn't he give you other advice besides?" asked the father.

"He advises me to go out and take exercise."

"Doesn't he say anything about what is harmful for you to eat? Are you allowed to drink coffee?" It was Grandmother who asked.

"He says that I must go out and take exercise," she replied with a somewhat louder voice.

"Doesn't he say that you will soon get well?" spoke little Lydia's childishly caressing voice, as she came and laid her chubby arms in the sister's lap.

"He says that I must go out and take exercise," was the reply which she, too, received.

Ivarsson took the letter and read it through.

"This doctor is a man of sense. He doesn't say very much, but one can read between the lines that he has good hopes for our little girl. I will send the prescription to the drug-store at once."

All arose from the table, and after a while Judith remembered that it was time for her to return to her room.

"Oh by no means—what's your hurry? Industrious as an ant! Give the sewing-machine a rest and stay and have a little supper with us! I thought of asking if my girls might come one week each and learn to sew dresses and things like that. They are not backward, either one of them. Both of them can sew, but you know there is a difference between what one picks up and what one is taught. Will you let them?"

"Yes, by all means, with the greatest pleasure!"

"All right, then. Gunnel will come to-morrow."

The proposition filled the heart of the lonely seamstress with a hitherto unknown joy. She was to have the whole sunshine with her for a whole week. Then the moonshine was to come—and she wondered how it would feel—and yet she was not particularly afraid of ghosts.

Nanna seated herself by the window with her crocheting, and Gunnel accompanied her mother into the kitchen, where they prepared a splendid luncheon. Coffee with biscuits was deemed insufficient for an evening repast in this well apportioned home.

Ivarsson went out to do his chores, and the old grandmother seated herself beside Judith, who took some ruffling from her handbag, and, after the fashion of old women, began to ask questions about this and that.

Judith was interested by this new manner of life, to which she was so unaccustomed. But she

felt something like a chill come over her from the silent girl by the window, who, absorbed in herself, with rare swiftness caused one projection after another to spring into existence on the fine lace she was crocheting, and who all the time appeared as an alien element in the family.

Gunnel came from the kitchen and spread the table with a snow white, home-woven linen table cloth, after which she helped her mother in with a tray, filled with all kinds of good eatables.

The father came in from the threshing-floor and the boys from the pasture, and all partook with good appetite of the fine luncheon, with the exception of Nanna, who ate but little, and only of the dairy food. It made a queer impression—both pleasant and discouraging—on the lean seamstresses, to see all this extravagance. How carefully must she not measure and weigh the little crumbs which she had at her command, in order to make them go as far as possible! How different this was!

In the mean time the conversation was again brought to bear on the religious state of the community and what the Christians must do to spread the knowledge of Jesus Christ among the ignorant population, who were groping in darkness. Here many vineyard workers were required. No one who is a partaker of the divine nature and of the Holy Ghost must hold aloof and pretend that he can do nothing, for it is Christ in us and not



we ourselves who possesses both power and wisdom to work for the reclaiming of the erring ones. It is Christ in us and not we ourselves who is to gain the victory over the power of unbelief and sin. No Christian has received less than one talent to make use of—and our talent will also bring interest. This was Ivar Ivarsson's decided opinion, and contradictions were of no avail. All had some object to strive for. Ivarsson projected the building of a meeting-house and made inquiries of Judith as to how many members from far and near they could count on that would support the project, and wrote down their names and addresses. Mother Ivarsson, who had been president of the aid society in Sandum, wished to establish such a society as soon as possible. Gunnel, who advocated the Sunday school, took for granted that Judith would enter with heart and soul into its activity.

The sewing circle was to gather for the first time—and perhaps every week for some time to come—at Ivarsson's, likewise the Sunday school. All, even the little boys and little Lydia, were glad as if they were to have some real great fun for themselves. All except Nanna, who sat there quiet and with an expression that no one could read.

Yet no one seemed to pay any attention to her silence—they were all so accustomed to it—but all treated her with encouraging tenderness.

The twilight began to fall, and the moon, which

still struggled with the dying daylight, already shed a broad, pale silver ribbon into the big room.

"Nanna, did not the doctor say that you should go out and take exercise in the open air?—you are not obeying orders. This evening the weather is the loveliest that you could wish for," said the father and pinched his pale daughter playfully under the chin.

Nanna had during the spirited conversation among the others drawn closer and closer to the place where Judith sat.

"I will wait till Judith goes; then Gunnel and I can go with her and go out in the beautiful moonlight," replied the girl and rose from her seat, suddenly and unexpectedly to throw her arms around Judith's neck.

She had not spoken so much during the whole time, and her words and conduct made a peculiar impression on Judith's sensitive mind.

"Very well, then we must not tarry long, for the evenings are chilly," she replied.

"Let us have something for our souls first," smiled Ivarsson, taking the Bible from the shelf. There was a fervent devotional spirit in the little circle, and a spiritual vigor that filled the soul of the lonely seamstress with a mighty foretaste of what eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

Gunnel and Nanna dressed for their promenade,

while Judith took leave of the rest, but when they came out on the veranda the evening breeze blew brisk and cool into their faces.

"You have entirely too little on, my dear Judith. I will go in and fetch a shawl for you," said Gunnel and hastened back into the house.

They stood on the stone steps, and the moon poured a magic silver halo around Nanna's pale face. Judith eyed her sorrowfully. She felt sympathy, mixed with a certain respect, for this uncommunicative young creature—a mere child as yet.

"I suppose you, Nanna, are also a child of God," she said, prompted by a sudden, half unconscious impulse.

"No!"

There lay something decided, repelling, in this "no."

Judith was amazed.

"But I suppose you will be soon."

"The future will show, if I am to have any future," she replied in the same accents.

"Nanna!" someone called from the home, and the girl hastened in.

Judith felt surprised and almost bewildered. Presently Gunnel appeared in the doorway.

"What is the matter with you? You stand here and look like a living question mark in the moonlight," she said in her merry way.

"Yes," replied Judith, catching her breath. "I was so utterly amazed. I asked if Nanna was a child of God, and she replied that she was not. Can that be possible?"

A shadow of earnestness fell on the young, radiant face.

"Nanna is a closed jewel-casket, the contents of which will glitter and sparkle as soon as the sun shines on them, but to which no one as yet has the key. You see, this key must be of gold, and the gold is still hidden in the ore of an unworked gold mine—and this gold mine stands here before my eyes."

Judith was still more amazed than she had been before, for the voice appeared to her to be not that of Gunnel—the cheerful, openhearted Gunnel, but that of some entirely different personality—a prophetess—and the words impressed her as if Gunnel had been one. Her heart said yea and amen. There was something "mystical" about Gunnel, just as her father had said, and Judith involuntarily thought of the daughters of Philip the Evangelist, "virgins who prophecied."

Now Nanna came out on the veranda carefully wrapped, and a solicitous, motherly "Don't stay out too long," followed her from within the house.

The moonbeams glittered in the short, dewy grass on the lawn, and the evening was lovely in spite of the chill. Gunnel talked warmly and energetically of that which most interested her,



and her plans irresistibly carried Judith along. Nanna, who had tucked her arm under Judith's and snuggled close to her as if she would like to steal into her heart, did not say much; but her pointed, somewhat abrupt remarks gave Judith to understand that if she spoke little, she thought more.

In order that Nanna might get sufficient exercise they walked along the country road toward Skuggvik, which lay but a short distance from Hedeberga.

The girls walked in silence quite a while and close together, and the moon threw long shifting shadows of their forms ahead of them on the broad highway, which, straight and smooth, lay between fenced fields and wooded pastures. The lake glittered forth like a blue mottled silken cloth, inlaid with silver.

"How beautiful it must be here during sunlight! But perhaps it is the weird moonlight that makes everything look so romantic. When you get time, Judith, you must go with us and help to pick a suitable location for our meeting-house."

"You expect too much of me, my dear Gunnel. It will no doubt be best if they do it themselves."

"But you have a more cultured taste than any of us, and you are bound to be very much interested. We expect much of you, as you will know."

"Don't do that, Gunnel. I have no qualifications whatever for becoming what you expect me to be."

"You don't know that yet. No one knows how much fine metal a gold mine contains before one has penetrated into its interior and begun to take out the ore. Hush! We are meeting somebody."

"I actually believe it is the girls from Skuggvik, the ones I have talked about. That's what it is! They no doubt are coming to see me. They call on me now and then."

"That's fine! Surely God has put it in their minds to come tonight. Now we will try to catch them by strategem. You introduce us to each other, will you?"

"What is this? Is Judith out for a walk this moonlight evening? That is something unusual."

"Yes, I have encountered a power against which all resistance is useless. These are my new neighbors, Gunnel and Nanna Ivarsson, daughters of my new landlord. Justina Ringblom, Malla Söder." A few warm handshakes, and the acquaintance was made.

Immediately the sewing circle became the topic for discussion, and the girls from the manor were delighted with the project—if it were only possible to join!

But they would try. They agreed to pray God to incline the hearts of those who exercised authority over them to give them liberty one evening in the week to attend the sewing circle.

"But it is so usual for them to consider that we

usually stay in, although the others go out as they like. But wouldn't it be fine!"

Yes, they would all four pray.

When Judith and her company had bidden one another good night and she inserted the key in her door, Whitis sat outside and waited patiently.

How different it was to go to rest now from what it had been before. But sleep would not visit her couch. Her mental faculties had been too much aroused to be calmed all at once. But they were only pleasant experiences she had had this day. It was indeed a momentous turning point in her life, but still—it had brought something unharmonious into her sentimental world—a string had been touched that produced discordant sounds and marred the symphony.

She had gotten into a circle of warm, loving sisters and brethren in the faith, who without exception had shown her, the lonely worker, the most considerate love and familiarity. A new and wide vista had opened before her vision, with the greatest and serenest possibilities, in a light that nearly blinded her—a light that should disperse the dense shadows that for centuries had hung over this locality, so that Christian activity here also might make headway.

But it had come so suddenly and she still perceived, as it were, the hum of a new era, an echo of one project after another, and the different voices still sounded in her ears, urging active measures

on her part and making her responsible for their success. She had often enough inwardly murmured at her lot as being a superfluous, neglected creature, with no other purpose in life than to struggle for her own useless existence. But now she had learned that she was a cog in the great machinery that is called Work for Christ, and that she had no right to hold aloof, no matter how the commencing movement should wear on her personal self.

It was as if the power of the energy of her new friends could have crushed her. She felt powerless, reduced to nothing under the burden of the many demands which this new life work placed on her. Neither could she escape the unpleasant feeling that the zeal of her new friends implied a silent accusation against her because she had hitherto stood as an inactive worker looking at the dismal field where souls are lost in darkness and misery, and where she had allowed the darkness to encroach without endeavoring to spread light around her. There were heart beatings and anxiety, but also sighs, tears, and prayers. She wanted to excuse herself on the plea of her own insignificance and helplessness, but that gave her no peace. There was nothing to do but to shoulder her guilt and pray for forgiveness for her inactive, and selfish life. Not till she had abandoned all attempts at selfjustification and offered herself to do the will of God, did she feel at ease, and the Spirit of God whispered in her soul: "He giveth power to the




faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." "My power is made perfect by weakness."

A sweet peace stole over her, and she fell asleep as quietly as a little tired bird under the soft wing of its mother.

## FOURTH CHAPTER

### The Sunlight Week

HEN Judith opened her eyes at her usual early morning hour, they were met by a brilliant sunlight that broke through the thin window shade over the scantily furnished room. All dark clouds had also passed from her spiritual horizon and there was sun and summer in her heart. Her whole life had assumed a different aspect from what it had before. It held for her also an amount of worth and beauty which she had never before dared to picture to herself. Not until now did she understand the happiness of living for Him who died and rose even for her and it was a real thanksgiving which she this day offered up to her God.

Neither was her everyday life, with the monotonous, tiresome work of sewing henceforth to be as sunless as before. The great sunlight was this week to share in her work, and while they were busily at work measuring, cutting, stitching and ruffling, they would confer regarding all the newly hatched schemes for carrying on the missionary work.

But she ought to invite her new scholar to forenoon coffee!

It was a disconcerting thought in the midst of the newly awakened joy.

Her purse was completely empty, and the last coffee beans had been used up for her and her room mate on the forenoon of yesterday. There was enough left for breakfast for her, besides two small pieces of sugar in the bowl, that was all. It was disheartening.

"What! Is Gunnel here already?" she thought, almost in a fright, as she heard swift steps on the stairway. No, it was not Gunnel, although the pace was like hers; instead it was Malla Söder from the manor, who, red faced and in a hurry, came in to the half dressed seamstress without knocking.

"Dear me, how I have run! Do you know, Judith, the major's wife has completely forgotten to pay for the silkdress which you altered before she made the trip to the coast. You remember she promised she would pay you on her return and, just think, she forgot it; and she just happened to remember it when I mentioned that you had a new landlord and landlady. She most humbly begs your pardon. Here are five crowns—there should be some interest, she said, because you have had to wait so long. And then she bids you accept a few rolls—we baked yesterday—and, would you believe it, she didn't make any fuss at all when Justina and I spoke about the sewing circle. 'Judith is a

sensible girl, and her company can hardly be anything but all right for you,' she said."

"But Miss Divén, what do you suppose she thinks?"

"Oh, she!" Malla made a significant motion with her head. "You see, I was smart enough to go to the major's wife first—and then Miss Divén had nothing to say."

"Do you pray for your ladies, Malla?"

"I gues I do! And the uglier Miss Divén is, the more I think I have cause to pray for her. But for goodness' sake, why don't you tell me to go?"

Thus God's faithfulness had once more put Judith's unbelief to shame. And this to her great joy. Now she had the most delicious coffee rolls to offer her sunflower, and coffee and sugar could be had by the wholesale in the store down by the Post office. She could easily get there and back before nine.

When Gunnel came, the scent of freshly roasted coffee was noticable far out in the corridor, "and that is the best aroma I know of," she said with hilarity.

"Those are finer cakes than ours, without envy be it said. Have you baked them yourself?" asked Gunnel, when Judith at eleven had spread her little coffee table in the most attractive way possible.

"How you talk! When would I have time for anything like that? And where should I bake such cakes, say?"



"But I suppose you know how?"

"Know how! It's no very big trick—but there are certain things that are necessary."

"No doubt you know a lot that I have no idea about. And such a fine taste you have in everything. One sees that as soon as one comes into this room with all its little attractions. You look like a cultured person, and no doubt you are, although you don't want to let on that you are."

"Now don't make fun of me, Gunnel. You know as well as I that I am nothing and am good for nothing. I am nothing but a poor snail that prefers to withdraw into its own shell."

"A snail!—pshaw! Then I know better what you are."

"Don't talk about the gold mine again, Gunnel! It spoils all the joy I feel at having you with me. It seems to me you ought to be too conscientious to flatter like that."

"Flatter! Oh, nothing of the kind! If a thing is well done and some one says it is, he does not flatter; he merely gives the outhor due recognition. And if I say that this thing has not yet been put to proper use, that is not flattery, but the reverse— isn't that so?"

"Yes—," said Judith, slowly and thoughtfully. "I am willing enough to do what I can and as the Lord gives grace to do—but don't count on me— don't expect too much of me."

"That is just what we are going to do. You sang when I came in."

"Sang!—Yes—I have accustomed myself to humming when I sew; it is company in solitude."

"And what a pretty voice you have! That is something I don't have."

"Oh, I guess it is nothing to brag about. I scarcely hear myself how I sing, but I like the words in some of the songs. They are appropriate for me, and I need them; God and I communicate by means of song."

"Now I suppose you think I want to flatter you on account of your pretty voice. But that is so far from my purpose that I do not even congratulate you on having a good companion in it, although I admit that even that should be appreciated. But now I thought more of what use God can make of your song than of yourself. Haven't you thought of making your voice a sacrificial gift to your Lord and Master?"

"Sacrifice it! Quit singing?"

Gunnel could not hold back a good-natured laugh.

"No, indeed you are to sing—sing with your thoughts on Him who has given you the gift of song. It is a noble gift, and if you offer it to the Lord, He will sanctify it, so that you will be permitted to sing the gospel into many a hardened heart, which otherwise would never be reached by the grace of God's salvation."

“How sanguine you are, Gunnel! You believe me capable of accomplishing great things.”

“Yes, you will accomplish great things. Great things are in most cases composed of mere little things. I once saw at an industrial exposition a cloth which was the *chef d'oeuvre* of the exposition and won a great prize. And yet this cloth was composed throughout of small pieces of silk—so small, that they were good for nothing else. But thanks to ingenious laying out and a most tasty arrangement of color this cloth was a complete masterpiece, winning universal admiration—notwithstanding it was all patchwork. ‘Great things are born of silence,’ says the proverb, and all work is great if the motive power is faith, which worketh through love.”

“But my dear Gunnel, what kind of patchwork shall I do that will amount to a great work? You will have to tell me that.”

“You can do more good in our sewing circle than any of the rest of us. You have what we partly lack, taste and skill, and in addition ingenuity. For instance, look at your table cloths, shelves, and many other ornamental articles. Who among us could produce such pretty things with such simple material? Then you have your gift of song; we need it at our prayer meetings and in our Sunday school. Children generally love to sing, and they can learn from you. And you read so well; I heard that this morning. That comes

handy at the sewing meetings and when we visit the sick."

"Say, but stop now, Gunnel!"

"Ah now, don't interrupt me! You have doubtless great knowledge of the Scriptures. Ah yes—it will be of use at our young people's meetings. You see, the great work will soon be ready to start. Yet it will be best for you to view it as mere patchwork. But, it must be an affair of the heart, a reciprocal action between you and God, just as the steam power is the result of a reciprocal action between the fire and the machinist."

Judith sighed deeply. Again she felt helpless before a superior power, a demand that threatened to overwhelm her instead of imparting to her the requisite strength.

She told Gunnel about it, and a tear dropped on the black cloth in her hands.

Gunnel suddenly looked up, and the eager expression in her eyes became mild and humble. "My dear Judith, forgive me! You are older than I, and I talk as if I were wiser than you. But I come from a neighborhood where Christian activity is highly developed and had the steam up, as they say, and I may be too eager to get it up here also. But I will take nothing back of what we expect of you. You are a gold mine, no matter how much you object to the epithet, and the Owner of the gold mine will no doubt see to it that the gold will be brought to light. The great power must be of



God and not of us. His power is made perfect by weakness."

Again the words had a quietening effect on Judith. She smiled and looked happy, yes happy, when it occurred to her that her beloved Lord would say of her as He said of Mary of Bethany: "She hath done what she could."

Gunnel was not a slow scholar. She had practised up well by herself. But with her fine intuition of her teacher's sense of thoroughness she was very particular to ask her and conform to her method, and the work sped swiftly beneath the deft fingers, while a spiritual conversation was carried on between the two workers. The conversation was not ordinary girls' talk and foolish nonsense, accompanied by silly laughter. Neither was it any whispered gossip with ever anon an injunction not to tell any one, but it was a conversation full of spirit and life—they were words which were to bear their harvest of deeds wrought in God.

Judith's later life had been a continued longing for some one with whom she could feel a sympathetic relation—some one who could not merely awaken her interest, but who would feel the same way for her. This person was seated beside her now...

There is implanted in every womanly nature a strong desire to surrender herself to some one—surrender her warmest emotions, her noblest gifts,

her finest instincts—for whom her inner world is to unfold its most fragrant blossoms. But there is also a craving to get something in return. There must be some sunshine to call forth a world of flowers with color and fragrance, if it is not to wither and dwindle away in the very bud. Now that day had arrived. Her heart's desire had been fulfilled to such a degree, that all seemed to her like a dream. She felt that she was better understood by her new friend than she had been by her former acquaintances. They were so unlike, they and she, just as if they had not been of the same nature. She could love them but never felt quite satisfied with their company. Now she felt satisfied, but she also seemed to notice that demands were put upon her which she could not meet. It was evident that Gunnel raised the telescope too high—or else she, in some unaccountable way, knew more about the contents of the “gold mine” than the gold mine itself. However, life had now won a higher significance, and in the company of this creature, brimful of life, with sun and warmth in her soul, who nevertheless in all was guided and directed by the Spirit of God, it was as if her youth had returned, and the oppressive thought that she had “passed the line” gave way to renewed vitality and energy. During the night, when she lay awake from over-exertion, dreary thoughts, like ominous clouds, would often plunge her soul into darkness, but in the morning, when the door was opened by “the

golden-haired prophetess," sunlight and spring rushed with her into the room, and then it became light in her heart also.

"Listen, Judith, you will have to move one of these days," said Gunnel one day, quite seriously, when the machines had been humming so incessantly that conversation had been impossible.

"Move!" Judith's face turned if possible still paler than before. "Do you mean that?"

"I only mean what I have heard father and mother say. They think that this old building is only a detriment to the premises and is absolutely of no use. I think Father intends to tear it down next month and use the old lumber, some of which seems to be still sound, for building a nice little summer kitchen. That will be a better idea—or what do you think?"

She got no reply to her question.

To be sure it would be a nice thing for the owner and occupant of the premises not to have to see the ugly old structure, which stood there like a phantom from a bygone age. But it had been the home of the poor seamstress for many years, and she had become attached to this home, just as her companion Whitis, who had not been forgotten by the former occupants, as she supposed, but been taken to the new place, where, however, he did not feel at home, and from which, following his inclination, he had returned alone to the old home.

Whither should she go, poor Judith?

Gunnel had to wait for a reply. She looked up from her work and saw the significant pallor of her friend's face.

"Judith," she said tenderly, "you must not think for a moment that Father would drive you out and leave you without a home."

"I don't believe that you want to make me homeless, but—I shall never feel as much at home anywhere else as here in Hedeberga. It is as if I had grown fast here," she said with an attempt at smiling, but the smile vanished in tears.

"But don't you think that you will feel just as much at home in the west gable room up in the main building? Father has had carpenters there the whole week to finish it, and to-day the painter came. The wall paper samples are here, and this evening you must go with me up and select the wall paper you like best."

Always the same pace. There was nothing for Judith to do but allow herself to be pulled along.

"I fear it will too fine and expensive for me," whispered Judith. "I cannot offer so low a rent for that large, fine room as for this."

"Now don't indulge in any needless worrying. The rent will be the same as here—I know that—and now you know it too. Won't that be nice?"

"But won't you need that room yourselves?"

"I guess we have room enough. We have the sitting room, the bed room, and the kitchen down-



stairs. And I suppose you have seen that Father has brought home lumber for an addition on the other side of the house? Haven't you? Well, there is to be kitchen, and the kitchen we now have is to be our sitting room, it is so large and light. And then Nanna and I will have the gable room opposite, which is also ready for the painter. I think it will be very nice, don't you?"

"The best is good enough, and it isn't I that will be losing. But can I take Whitis with me? And then—just think what a running there will be up and down the stairs by my customers!"

"How many things you have to worry about! We have thought of both the cat and the customers and do not intend to drive any of them away. Everything is clear. I can just see your nice little things in the new, light room with its white floor and tall bay window."

"But—stove!"

"Oh, you can roast your coffee down in the kitchen. And then, listen: You will get an oil stove of the kind that doesn't smoke or make any soot; there will be one put in as a part of the furniture of the room. And you will have a large, nice pantry with shelves to put things on and a neat little door opening into the pantry; and in there you can cook both coffee and food. On the other side is a clothes closet. Could you want anything better?"

"You dear folks! Who could have thought that I would see such bright days!"

During these moments of familiar conversation, at intervals during the humming of the machine, and while the needles were flying like lightning, Judith related to Gunnel the story of her life. It was a picture with deep shadows and scarcely any light point, until the light from on high finally shed its lustre on the scene.

Her parents were both natives of G—. Strangers to the life in God, they were carried along on the great waves of humanity which surged about the breakers of worldly pleasures and indifference. They had been joined together more as the result of a thoughtless, sudden whim than of any real affection. She was a factory girl, was good looking but uneducated. He was a dock laborer who at time had an abundance of work and money, but at other times had neither. At an early age too, he had become a frequent visitor of low class taverns. Poverty, disorder, and quarrels were Judith's earliest recollections from the home of her childhood. Fortunately Judith was the only child, and when she was eight years of age her drink-ruined father disappeared from the home and was never heard of again. The girl was taken in hand by an aunt, who treated the little slender, timid girl with severity, but also taught her to love order and cleanliness and, when the girl was old enough, made her learn dressmaking. In

the meantime her mother found employment as waitress at a cheap boarding house and would in all probability have become a moral wreck if she had not through a severe cold contracted an incurable disease. She was nursed at a hospital for a time, but when othing more could be done for her there the doctors advised her to try to get out into the country. She had an old aunt who owned a cottage in this vicinity—the chimney could be seen yonder—and there the sick woman was allowed to stay in consideration of a small monthly payment.

Her daughter grew into womanhood, but the recollections from home constantly lay as a shadow over her happiness and youthful gaity. Her mother an invalid for life! And her father? Perhaps a human wreck, sinking in a sea of misery or perhaps dead—the hard death of a transgressor. Here was a wound that never ceased to smart, and that could not be healed. But if her heart was capable of harboring a deep, silent grief it was also capable of other deep sentiments. And when earthly happiness offered itself to her in the form that for every young woman is the most alluring, and when she stood ready to stretch out her hand to receive it, she was informed by letter that her mother's old relative had died, and that the cottage which she had held for life now would pass to others. No one would take charge of the sick woman for the old meager compensation. Now both feeling

and reason told Judith that it devolved upon her to care for her mother, whom, in spite of everything, she had never ceased to love. But with this step she must give up forever the dreams of her youth—all her alluring prospects and all the joy and happiness that life seemed to have promised her.

She had a very painful struggle with her own heart, her selfishness, as she said, but she won a dearly bought victory. Then she went to her mother, rented this room, and toiled for her and herself night and day. It was here, within these tottering walls, that she cared for the helpless woman with the greatest tenderness. It was here that she in solitude and unseen by her mother shed the bitterest tears over broken promises, cold, heartless, selfishness, and a lost ideal. Here also the light from above finally dawned upon her soul, and here she saw her mother rejoice in the same light.

Here, under this sombre roof, which threatened to fall down and crush her, she was enabled to walk in the light and have fellowship with the Father and with His Son, while the peace of God made her dreary home a radiant palace. But here she also had to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. Here she had to suffer privations until the only being for whom she had a right to live and care passed from the sorrows of earth and, liberated and cleansed, soared to where the



thief on the cross enjoyed the company of his Savior.

Now she was all alone in the world. It was then that she began to find her life useless and meaningless. In her heart lay a world of undefined feeling of warmth and self-sacrifice, a craving to devote herself. But no one needed this offering. It was a wealthy locality that she had come to, and the poor were well provided for by the municipality. It seemed to her that scarcely anybody there needed her sympathy, and she did not have the courage to return to her native town. Its memories had not yet faded from her mind. More and more she withdrew from the company of human beings and shut herself up from the outside world. There were scarcely any real Christians in the neighborhood beside her old landlord and landlady, and they didn't seem to think much of a piety that was not inspired by the parson and the church. It was then she assumed that cold, deliberate manner which was only a covering shell for a soul that thirsted for understanding and sympathy, and a heavy, raw mist settled down on her, chilling her sensibilities and shutting off the spiritual outlook. She had gotten into a harmful atmosphere. She felt and acknowledged it now; but if it is to become spring in nature and the snow is to melt, the sun must shine and shed its warmth.

And now the sun had come and warmed up her frozen soul, the sun in the form of a faith-strong,

warm-hearted peasant girl, who burned with zeal for her crucified Savior, and who with her cheerful, devoted Christian life taught her the secret of having God and having enough.

"How did you come under conviction?" Gunnel once asked.

"Small causes sometimes have great effects. In the busy hay season Father Swan used to hire a poor girl to help him. She wasn't exactly to their liking, for she belonged to the erring sheep who went to private meetings and listened to "clandestine preachers." But for all that she was not of the world, and therefore they tolerated her. She lived with her old sickly mother in a backwoods cottage not very far from here; in fact she lives there yet, although the old woman is dead. She is not very talented but she has a warm heart. One morning she came up here in the attic to hang up wet clothes, and while so doing she sang a song to herself. She isn't much of a singer, but the words, which she sung clearly and correctly in her best nasal tones, were uttered with wonderful distinctness and left an impression which neither time nor circumstances have been able to efface. Oh, it seems to me that I hear it yet:

"Will you reach that home of bliss  
For the saints, I mean?  
Or will you that glory miss  
Which no eye hath seen?"



“Will you gain the victor’s palm  
And the harp of gold  
And depart, serene and calm,  
When your days are told?”

“I sat quietly listening to the song as if I had been held by unseen fetters. Every word had a barb which hooked itself fast in my inmost being. Especially the third verse was full of darts and shafts for me:

“But what gain will you receive  
From such boundless grace,  
If to some one else you leave  
Your appointed place?  
If you miss the heav’nly goal  
And rich reserved,  
Promised to the faithful soul  
By a faithful Lord?  
With your place in heaven lost,  
You have lost it all.”

“A place in heaven, prepared for me by Jesus—a place which I nevertheless might miss—that was a new thought, a thought which had never before entered my mind. But now that thought dominated me so that I sat there both dumb and motionless.

“‘Judith, what is it you are singing?’ my mother asked faintly. She had been slumbering and was awakened by the song.’

“‘It isn’t I, Mother, it it Maja-Lisa.’

“Mother lay quiet a while, and Maja-Lisa had stopped singing but was still humming away in the attic.

“‘Ask Maja-Lisa to come in and sing for me.’ said my mother. ‘She is religious, they say, and maybe she knows how a poor creature like myself can be saved.’

“Never before had I heard my mother talk thus or express a doubt that she would be saved. Neither had it occurred to me that she would not be saved who had suffered so much.

“I went out in the attic and asked Maja-Lisa to come in and sing one of her songs for my mother.

“She smiled broadly, but this smile always had something inexpressibly good in it.

“‘I am no singer,’ she replied, ‘but God has given me so much to rejoice over that I can’t help singing. I shall be glad to sing for the lady, if she likes to hear about Jesus, because, you see, I don’t sing about anything else. But now I have to go out in the hay, you understand, so we have to wait till to-night, if I may come that late.’

“How we both waited that day! I with a newly awakened uneasiness and fear, and my ‘mother with the whole eagerness of one who is hungry and longs to satisfy her hunger.

“‘What place was that she was singing about, a glorious place, which Jesus has prepared, but which we still may miss? Do you know anything about such a place, Judith?’

“‘I haven’t thought of it before, but I guess it is so all right,’ I said with unsteady voice.



“‘I had a pretty home down there in G. when Lars was young and you, Judith, were small. I had a view of a pretty garden with so many flowers—and pretty furniture he had bought, your father. Then he began to drink, and I became indifferent and careless and so he ran away and I had to sell out and leave my cozy home. Since then I haven’t had any place of my own till you came and rented this room. And it is good enough for me of course. You have kept it clean and nice, but yet—Yes, if Jesus has prepared a place for me in heaven I don’t want to miss it, I want to get there, you see.’

“How she longed and yearned, but sin had not yet become exceedingly great to her.

“It was ten o’clock in the evening when Maja-Lisa came, warm and perspiring from her work, but still willing to forego her brief rest for our sakes. She had her hymnbook with her, and she was asked to sing the song concerning ‘The Place’ once more. Mother began to talk about how she longed for that place. She didn’t want to miss it.

“Maja-Lisa made no reply to her remarks, but after sitting quiet and meditative a while she commenced to sing another song:

“Oh, I know a land where heaven’s God

For His loved ones hath prepared a city.

When their bodies are laid beneath the sod,

There He doth receive their souls in pity.

Earthly woes then are dead,  
They are never touched with sadness,  
For no tears in heaven's land are shed;  
No, they taste eternal joy and gladness.

But alas! No man can entrance gain  
Who hath not been cleansed from sin's pollution.  
Hark, dear Soul, canst thou thy right maintain,  
Or wilt thou be left in sore confusion?

Earthly woes, — — — ”

“‘Maja-Lisa, come down for a while!’ called old Stina, and she closed the book and went.

“‘I will be back soon,’ she said comfortingly.

“‘No one shall enter there who is not cleansed from the stains of sin,’ repeated my poor mother in a hopeless voice. :I guess it’s of no use then.’

“To tell the truth I was more worried for her than for myself. She was so weak, and the little flickering flame of life might be extinguished at any moment.

“During the night her uneasiness increased and I did not know what to do. We had neither Bible nor hymn book. A church hymnal was the only book of a religious nature which we had. I brought it out and asked if I should read a hymn.

“‘Yes, read one in the back part of the book, one that relates to persons about to die.’

“I wasn’t at all familiar with the book, for neither my mother nor I had cared much for

religion. I turned to Hymn No. 463 and read it from beginning to end:

"Eternity! Thy length is quite appalling!  
Beginning, yet within no limits falling!  
Eternity—a time devoid of time!  
My thoughts grow dizzy as thy heights they climb.

As long as God is God and God remaineth  
The torment of the lost its pangs retaineth  
In utter darkness, which will see no light  
As long as God is God of truth and might."

"Those were terrible words, so I myself thought in my newly awakened uneasiness. Glancing at my mother I perceived that she was sitting half upright in the bed, while her face was white as chalk.

"'What will become of me, Judith? Close the book. I don't dare to hear any more. What will become of me?'

"I bitterly regretted my thoughtlessness in not selecting a hymn of a more consoling nature. I did not yet understand that the choice was not mine. What should I say to her who was in deep agony and repeatedly exclaiming: 'What will become of me? How can I repent while I am lying here? What will become of me?'

"'Dear Mother, calm yourself! You haven't done more evil than many others. And you have suffered so long that you have surely atoned for your sins!' Just think how blind I was!

“ ‘Worse than others! Haven’t I done more evil than others? You don’t know how much evil I have done, my dear child! Oh, if any one deserves to be damned it is I. Suffered, you say—how can that atone for my sins? The suffering I have brought on myself by recklessness and vice. I am lost.’

“It was heartrending to see and hear her unconsolable anguish and not have a comforting word to say. My own heart was torn with a sense of guilt and fear, and I dared not pray to a God so severe in His justice.

“Glancing out through the window I spied Maja-Lisa’s red-checkered kerchief by the barn. She looked cheerful as usual, and I wondered greatly why God was so good to her and so angry with us. I didn’t understand it, you see. I opened the window and called her. She looked up and nodded pleasantly. It was as if I had beheld an angel when I saw her awkward figure with the plump, shining face. She went back into the barn, where she helped Stina, Mother Britta’s old maid, to milk the cows. How infinitely long every minute seemed to me till she again made her appearance—and then with a milk pail in each hand.

“After a while I heard her footsteps in the stairway, and her ruddy face with the sparkling eyes appeared at the door.

“ ‘How is the lady to-day?’ she asked in a



drawling tone, and I don't understand how she could give such a touching effect to her harsh voice.

"'Poorly, my dear Maja-Lisa! I am in despair. I am afraid I shall never get to heaven—on account of the stains of sin—you know—'

"Her sobs shook her frame, so I thought my heart would break. But Maja-Lisa did not look sad in the least. On the contrary there was a gleam in her eye at times, as if she rejoiced at my mother's tears. It was that wisdom which is hidden from the wise and prudent but revealed to babes.

"She drew the hymn book from her pocket and began to sing:

"Lo, there is a healing, cleansing flood,  
Which can rid thy soul of sin's pollution,  
Wash thy stains in Jesus' precious blood,  
White as snow thou'lt be from this ablution."

"'There is the remedy. And it helps, because it has helped me.'

"'But you didn't have so much sin to account for as I have,' sighed my mother.

"'Before God we are all sinners, the best as well as the worst, and no one has anything to boast of before him. There is no difference; Jesus will take your sins away as quickly as he took mine.'

"'Yes, my dear Maja-Lisa, I suppose it is like

that. But, you see, I should first repent and grieve over sin and then—'

"'By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God. But to him that worketh not, but believeth in Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness.'

"She had her New Testament with her and read of the sinner in the house of the pharisee. It was remarkable what light and clearness of thought that unlettered girl did have. They were our most pleasant moments when she came up to read, sing, and reason with us, for both mother and I were bound by unbelief and besides ignorant as heathens. But finally the light came to both of us. Now, what pleasant times we had with God and with each other, until God a year later took my mother away from me. Since then I have lived like a hermit and have not till now given any earnest thought to—"

"That you are an unworked gold mine. Thank you for your story! It has made you great in my eyes, for it is remarkable what nobility suffering does bring with it. What are my experiences compared with yours?"

"And still you are a branch of the Vine which has long borne fruit, while I have produced only leaves."


"What is fruit or leaves God only knows. But

we both live in God and He will, no doubt, see to it that we bring forth more fruit. Is Maja-Lisa living yet? I like her."

"Yes, she is living. I have sent word to her to come to the sewing circle next Saturday."

## CHAPTER V.

### The Sewing Circle.

HE following Saturday immediately after dinner the sewing circle met for the first time in Ivarsson's home. The commissioner's wife in Markerud had been informed of it by letter from Judith, and she was glad of the opportunity to take part in something so extraordinary. Maja-Lisa from Sörknatten brought with her an old lame woman of the neighborhood, who was one of those now retired from active affairs, but who nevertheless was glad to be present. As a result of the assistance Gunnel had given during the week Judith was able to dispatch her orders at noon, whereupon she hastened up to cut and arrange the work for the sewing circle. She had herself bought in the store a quantity of good remnants for aprons, and besides each one of the members furnished materials for work, with the exception of Maja-Lisa and Mother Annika, who got knitting-yarn for stockings from Mother Ivarsson. The commissioner's wife had brought three table cloths to hem. Mother Ivarsson was to sew a shirt of homemade muslin, and Gunnel had learnt from Judith how to embroider a pillow case, for which Nanna crocheted lace of a pretty pattern.



Judith intended to give the apron cloth to the girls from the manor, and herself commenced to sew on a tray cloth which she had stamped. So the work was in progress. But before the work commenced in earnest Ivarsson himself came in from the field for the purpose of opening the meeting with Bible reading and prayer, invoking the blessing of God on the newly formed sewing circle.

Maja-Lisa shone as a sun, and her small vivacious eyes beamed with happiness. Gunnel could not take her eyes from her where she sat by the fire place with a happy look on her broad face and with little winks and nods to Judith gave expression to her delight. She was the most interesting person of them all. Old Annika, her neighbor and companion in poverty and hardship, looked sickly and distressed, but a bright smile now and then glided over her sallow, wasted features, which was evidence that she too appreciated God's goodness to her.

The commissioner's wife was a tall, handsome woman with dark hair and regular features, which gave her an aristocratic air. In her conversation with Ivarsson she expressed herself correctly and to the point and seemed accustomed to have her judgment pass for something.

Ivarssons plan for the erection of a mission house was warmly seconded by her, although she did not show the interest in the project which had been expected from her. She was a woman of

deliberate calmness and self-control and was never carried away by a sudden flare of enthusiasm but logically calculated cause and effect before she consented to anything. A widow of two years she managed her large estate with the aid of two young sons. The younger of them had driven her to Hedeberga and now sat there on a chair awkward and confused, as if he did not know what to do with his chubby self, until Yngve and Björn came in. They were a good deal younger than the commissioner's son, but they were boys, and so the spell was broken.

Mother Tilda was not allowed to sew many stitches on the shirt to-day, for all the duties of a hostess, with coffee and dainties, now lay on her. The girls should be permitted to remain at work, for they could accomplish more than she, as her eye-sight was beginning to fail. Besides she did not want to take Gunnel from the conversation on a proposed Bible text. All worldly conversation, town gossip, and unkind allusions to this or that person were as a matter of principle excluded from their gathering.

Now the coffee was brought in with fresh buns, tempting coffee rolls, and homemade ginger snaps. As a rule only three kinds of pastry were allowed, but what was lacking in kinds was made good by the size of the allowable eatables. This rule was adopted principally for the sake of those with slender means, who now and then wished to

entertain the sewing circle, and also for the purpose of guarding against vanity on the part of the hostess in trying to excel others. Gunnel carried the coffee around on a large tray, provided with a cloth and a shining nickel coffee pot. The poor women's eyes turned appreciatingly toward the inviting repast. Such a regalement was not of too frequent occurrence for them, and even the lady commissioner declared with her calm dignity that she had not for a long time enjoyed such excellent coffee.

At six o'clock the manor girls arrived. The happy children! They seemed to be the most joyful of all, like prisoners who had unexpectedly regained their liberty. Few of those who enjoy the noble boon of liberty know how rightly to appreciate their state. With unmingled delight the two girls announced that they had permission to stay for the prayer meeting which was to be held after the sewing circle was over. They needed no sewing materials. Oh no! It was a joy for them to sacrifice something of their own for the good Lord, and so they had each bought cloth and yarn for a spread, cream colored goods to be sewed with cross stitches. Patterns they had borrowed from no less a personage than Miss Divén. Was it not great? Warm coffee awaited them too. Then the hostess invited her guests to a "smörgåsbord" in true country style, with all kinds of good and dainty things to eat. Here the hostess was not

hampered by any law, except the law of love, and she thought that those who had come a long way might well need a little to eat.

"Here now, Mother Annika, don't cut the bread! Put butter enough on the bread so you can see it. Take some, have some veal loaf! Don't forget 'ost-kaka,' by all means! You haven't had any dinner to-day. No, no, Maja-Lisa, don't take that little crumb! You ought to be able to eat some bread and butter after walking two miles! Don't you want to taste the eggs? Please help yourself!"—Yes, it was a task for Mother Tilda to get her guests to partake of all the good things, but it was a delightful task at that, and in her "you're welcome!" there lay a hearty hospitality.

"Nanna, you eat only bread and butter and cheese. Won't you taste your mother's fine veal loaf or steak?" inquired the commissioner's wife, who had her eyes open.

"I don't eat what reminds me of suffering creatures. I don't want to live on the flesh of butchered animals," replied the girl and hastily turned from the table.

"She has her own ideas," remarked Mother Tilda in reply to the lady's look of surprise.

Ever and anon Judith had to sing a song, and all listened attentively to her beautiful, clear voice and her expressive intonation. Her singing was particularly impressive to Maja-Lisa, who stared at her in wonder. She had by her singing brought



Judith into the communion of saints, and now Judith "sang Maja-Lisa into Paradise both body and soul," she remarked in amazement. Who would have expected anything like that of the quiet, sullen seamstress? In the mean time she cut patterns and instructed with an energy which showed that she was animated by a new impulse of life. It was a pleasure to do something for the Lord who had shed an undreamt of sunshine over her life.

Notice had been sent to all the surrounding neighbors that there would be a prayer meeting at Ivarsson's at eight o'clock. Hedeberga lay in a populous territory, and Skuggvik had a large number of working people. Curiosity was a good incentive. The rumor that Ivarsson's were religious people had swept over the community with the speed of the wind. Soon the large room, where seats had been improvised out of boards laid on chairs and horses, was filled to overflowing with tottering old men and women, middle-aged and young people of both sexes, and many children, who would not be deterred by the late hour or the long roads from the novel pleasure of attending a religious gathering of this kind.

With the exception of Ivarsson's, Judith, and Maja-Lisa, not one of them had a hymn-book. The meeting was therefore opened with the singing of a verse from the church hymnal, in which only a few joined carelessly. After the prayer Judith

was to sing. The audience sat spellbound and listened openmouthed to the clear, full tones, which had such a pleasing quality. They called for another song, and it was a delight for her to sing, something that had not occurred since she as first soprano took part in a singing society in G., where her voice had received a certain amount of training. Yes, it was a delight to sing the "sweetest carol ever sung, Jesus, blessed Jesus."

"It sounds as if she had golden strings in her throat," whispered Maja-Lisa to Gunnel.

"And she can afford it, because she is a gold mine," Gunnel whispered back with a mystical air.

Ivarsson arose from his chair at the table and looked out over the gathering.

"My friends," he said cordially, "we have no professional preacher or speaker with us this evening, and for that reason you will not listen to a regular sermon, as you perhaps expected. But you shall nevertheless hear the Word of God, for although I cannot preach, I can read. And I will do so praying and hoping that the loving and powerful word may find open hearts where it may become rooted, so that it may not meet the same fate as the seed that was sown by the wayside or in stony places or among thorns, which you have all heard about. And if the Spirit of God gives me grace now and then to make a simple application of something in the text. I hope you will

have no objection, and then God will bless His own Word, for He is no respecter of persons."

In a plain and easy manner he read the parable of the four kinds of seed bed, fervently imploring the presence of the Spirit, and then made practical and pointed applications of the text. He affected no sermonizing, neither did he endeavor to make his speech conform to rules of grammar, which he did not in reality know, but which he guessed were correct. He spoke unaffectedly, convincingly, from the heart, as one who has experienced what he spoke about, and his speech was not without effect. It was a speech suited to the hearers. That they could follow the speaker and grasp his meaning was evidenced by the fact that every eye gaze intently at him. Every one, young or old, fancied he spoke to him or her in particular.

After an impressive closing admonishment and hymn the assembly rose, the men bowing and the women curtsying, and gradually the crowded house was emptied, each one going to his or her own home, while groups here and there discussed what they had heard.

The commissioner's wife from Markerud was persuaded to stay over Sunday and visit the Sunday-School. Judith was to sing for the children and relate a story, and Gunnel was to study the text for the day with them.

With light heart and step Judith departed to her room. What a week this had been for her, and

what a day this last day of the week! The aching void of her life was no more; it had been filled. New, unknown powers stirred in her inner world, and she felt that life was worth living.

After retiring she had so much to think of that rest became a secondary matter. Why had it not been sufficient for her to possess the grace of God and be included in the atonement of Jesus? Why had not this sufficed to fill the emptiness of her heart and satisfy her longing? Was there not some self-righteousness in her new desire to be and do something? What if she was in danger of putting the practice of Christianity, so much to the front that her fellowship with Christ would become a secondary interest!

She determined to ask Ivarsson or Gunnel about this. But then the answer came to her quietly and softly from the knowledge of the Word which she had acquired by diligent private study. When she had for a while pondered on the passage: "Not of works, lest any man should boast," the sequence came clearly and decisively: "For we are His workmanship, erected in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

From this verse she saw clearly that she would never be able to accomplish enough; much less too much.

A sword that is never drawn from its scabbard must rust. A limb or a muscle which is never used



will be paralyzed and atrophied. The buried talent earns no interest for its owner.

“Go straight to my vineyard, the work is for you,  
For great is the harvest, and workmen are few,”  
she had sung at the prayer meeting. Were those words meant for her or for others? Had she not been standing idle long enough and merely looked on while the weeds grew and got the upperhand in the field about and within her? Was that to rely on her own power if she endeavored to accomplish as much good in her Lord’s vineyard as He gave her grace to accomplish?

No. It had now come to the point where the love of Christ was felt as an impelling power. His was therefore the power, not her own.

The many thoughtful faces which she had seen looking toward the speaker again passed review in her mind, and she felt deeply that nothing whatever had heretofore been done to lead these wandering sheep to their rightful Shepherd. With the exception of a very small minority they were all sheep who had no shepherd, and it was distressing to think that nothing at all had been done to lead them out of their spiritual darkness.

Would she now be accounted worthy of doing something, of contributing of her precious time and slender talent to a rescue work, undertaken for the purpose of snatching sinking souls from the ocean of sin that surged and roared round about her, and the ominous din of which now seemed to

have closed in upon her after having for a time struck her merely as a distant echo, too far off to concern her.

Oh, how deaf she had been! How gracious God had been to send Gunnel in her way—the girl with the warm and beautiful sunbeams, to which her deep spirituality with its penchant for the mystical, gave a subdued touch. What a beneficent influence she had already exerted over Judith's mode of thought! How different Gunnel and Nanna were! And yet this uncommunicative, repellent creature had an almost sentimental attraction for her. What lay beneath this calm exterior, in these large dark eyes that resembled a deep, still river in the evening twilight, but out of which one might every moment expect to see a water-spirit rise gold harp in hand?

Judith had often observed that she had keen powers of observation and a sound judgment. But what did make her so unlike the rest of the family?


During Ivarsson's discourse Nanna had been sitting by a little table behind the gathering and merely turned the leaves of an illustrated book of travels which lay there. Afterwards when the warriors of Jesus Christ and the spiritual armor were mentioned and the commissioner's wife had asked her if she had not joined the ranks, she replied:

"No, I belong to the neutrals,"—a reply that greatly surprised and perplexed the good woman.

“How will it feel to have her alone at work a whole week? Before this living problem Judith felt quite helpless. How could Gunnel pre-suppose—? No that’s impossible.

## CHAPTER VI.

### The Golden Key.

✧ ✧ ✧ SUNDAY with its clear sunshine, its  
✧  ✧ joyous company, its Sunday school work  
✧ ✧ with spirited singing and incentive  
✧ ✧ ✧ questions, beaming children's eyes, em-  
barrassed looks, awkward and foolish replies, al-  
ready belonged to the past. Monday came with  
overcast sky, dreary drizzle, and wet lawns and  
meadows. The white-bodied birches in the in-  
closure beyond the barn had their yellow crowns  
thinned out more and more, and the trees in the  
park about Skuggvik day by day assumed that color  
combination, peculiar to the season, of red, drab,  
yellow and green, which in all its splendor is the  
surest death symptom of summer. The rain beat  
in a monotonous and wearying manner against the  
small window panes, and Judith to-day fancied  
that her lowly apartment with its sure sign of de-  
cay looked more dreary than ever. "I have been  
spoiled by the light and comfort over yonder," she  
mused. "And it will not be a bit better when Nan-  
na comes, quiet and uncommunicative as usual. Her  
presence will only add new weight to my mood..."

"What a changeable creature I must be any-  
how!" she continued expostulating with herself.



"Yesterday I stood on sunny heights of triumph. To-day I am like the autumn sky, and the old Judith has returned."

She could not turn her thoughts from Nanna, and couldn't help feeling for the poor child who could not share in the joys of others. She must be subject to some secret suffering, which gnawed on her. She was too young to be a victim of the commonest form of young girls' misery—a disappointed affection, neither did she seem disposed that way. But something, in addition to bodily infirmity, was gnawing at her youthful happiness and making her uncommunicative and repellent. If she had not seen the real tenderness with which she was treated by the family, she might have been tempted to consider Nanna as the black sheep in a flock of white ones. But that was utterly impossible.

Occasionally she had come up to the sewing room during Gunnel's week, and Judith had remarked with astonishment that the young girl's glance, which, in the judgment of Gunnel, resembled a frozen lake when the winter sky is mirrored in the ice, sometimes acquired life and warmth when it rested on Judith and she thought herself unobserved. And then these eyes beamed and sparkled as if some fettered spirit for a moment had been permitted to use them as windows through which to gaze out upon life.

At the appointed hour Nanna came with an

absent look and a loitering gait and greeted her with a "Good morning" and a smile that had no life in them. She brought with her from her mother good bread and butter with cheese for herself and cold sliced meat for Judith besides cream for the forenoon coffee. "It will taste better here than at home," she said.

Judith had much to do this day and was in great need of some assistance. But she saw at a glance that she had but little assistance to expect in this case. Judith did not need to caution her against over-exertion, for after a while she laid her sewing aside and said with a tired air: "I would rather learn to embroider than to sew dresses. May I not, Judith?"

It was no easy matter for Judith to make such a promise. Instruct in embroidering, which is so trying, especially now when she needed help with a trousseau? But she did not have the heart to tell the girl this.

"I would gladly let you do that, Nanna, and no doubt it would interest you more—if I only had time to draw a pattern for you."

"I have some patterns myself, although I don't know how to work them. I will bring them along to-morrow; but now I will try to help you."

And she endeavored to make herself useful. She, like Gunnel, was very apt, but Judith saw plainly that she worked without pleasure or interest. Judith longed to open a conversation with the silent

girl which would permit her to get a glimpse of her inner world. But it happened as it frequently does when one wishes to speak the right words: One has nothing to say!

Gunnel's idea about the golden key occurred to her, and she smiled at it. Has the gold ore been taken out as yet? Or refined? How will it feel when the gold is to go into the crucible?

But those words of Gunnel would not give her any peace! She must endeavor to do something for this poor lamb, that had not yet yielded itself into the care of the Good Shepherd. She felt, though reluctantly, as if she were responsible for this young soul, which unreservedly had voiced its unbelief, and which God now had led into her way. She prayed for light and wisdom from God.

In the afternoon distant relatives of Ivarsson's called, and Nanna had to stay in. It was almost a relief to Judith.

The following day Nanna brought in to her a portfolio with the patterns and deposited it on Judith's bed.

"Are you going to embroider today?" inquired Judith.

"Not today. I will try my best to help you, since you have so much to do. But I brought the patterns nevertheless. We can look at them afterwards."

"Nanna, you said once that you are not a child of God. Can that be possible?"

It seemed as if Nanna were not unprepared for this question. She looked up and replied:

"Why should it not be possible? You can see that, can't you?"

There lay an expression of defiance mingled with subdued pain in her voice.

"But, Nanna, why are you not? What is the reason?"

"It is something no one can come to of himself, as you well know. 'The gifts of heaven are awarded in divers manners, and no one answers for what ne'er was given!' Thus Tegnér puts it," replied the girl curtly.

"But his words have no application here. 'Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely,' thus saith the Lord. Your excuse avails nothing, my dear Nanna."

"Well, then I suppose it is because I haven't got the will yet," replied Nanna in uncertain accents.

"Nanna, there must be something beneath this resistance of yours."

There was something imposing in Judith's words and manner. She felt her whole being aroused with pity for the young girl's spiritual condition as well as with zeal for the truth.

Nanna sewed on in silence. Then she looked up as if to beg for understanding and sympathy.

"There is much beneath," she said finally, "that neither you nor I can understand."



"But, Nanna, tell me what it is?"

"How do I know? Those are the dark depths of my nature, these bottomless pits of unbelief and doubts."

"But God loves you, Nanna, and longs to help you across the depths."

"Oh, He does? I haven't become aware of that!" There lay something so mocking in her tone that Judith was amazed.

"Dear child, you know that He does. You have grown up in an atmosphere of warm heartfelt piety, where God's love for sinners always has been the fundamental note. It is no news to you, I am sure. But you need to believe it. Then you have always been the object of love and tender care in a home that is blessed by God. What should cause you to question the love of God?"

"They are obliged to endure me once I am in this world, and it is a fact that I am now here. But I assure you that if I had my choice I would not have chosen to come here."

She firmly compressed her lips with an expression of profound bitterness.

Judith sewed and wondered. What could it be that had given this young girl such a dismal view of her existence, and how could it be remedied?

"I fail to understand that you have anything but your bodily ailment to be unhappy over, my dear Nanna. And you are on the road to improvement, I have heard."

"I never shall improve. My existence appears to me like that of a dwarfed plant that needed to stand in the sunshine but which instead has been shoved deep, deep into the shade. I only wonder how God can give so unequally, if He is love, as you say—and if He—would He then shower all imaginable blessings on some people and cause others to be deprived of everything—save unrealized wishes?"

"I don't see the justice of what you say, Nanna! Is your lot so dreary? How can it be? You have a good intellect, exceptionally so—I understand that. And a fine, intelligent appearance."

"Fine!" Nanna tossed her head contemptuously backward, "sick and flabby and repulsive, say—"

"How unjust you are! I liked your little pale face at once, although Gunnel, of course, looks more healthy and blooming. But you complement one another."

"Yes, about as a little withered white clover and a beautiful, fullblown rose. The insignificance of one only serves to heighten the splendor of the other."

"But, Nanna, I hope you are not envious of your own sisters! In the first place you have no cause for envy, and in the second place I have thought you too noble-minded to be envious. Envy is a bitter root, which God—"

"Pshaw! Nonsense! God doesn't regard me as worth the trouble of eradicating any evil whatso-

ever out of my heart. He lets the weeds grow free and unchecked in me as fast as they can. What's the difference if nettles grow on a dump?"

There was an inexpressibly deep bitterness in the girl's voice, which implied more than the words uttered. Judith was overwhelmed. She felt powerless and without an answer before this strange outburst.

There was a soul life full of possibilities, a confusion of thoughts, sentiments, and perceptions, but all twisted. The words attested a crying need of something mediatory, something that could bring order and harmony into this chaos.

Judith gazed with a look of surprise and warm, heartfelt sympathy on this pale face, which seemed to have congealed into ice.

This glance from these mild, sad eyes seemed somehow to make itself felt by the young girl. She looked up hastily at Judith and her face melted. Then she burst into violent sobbing, and Judith let her sob. That the poor girl was uncomprehended, although loved, by her family, was becoming more and more evident to her, and it was as if the girl had had a perception of Judith's thoughts.

"Judith," she said, when she had somewhat regained her composure, "let me speak with you—just you—do you hear? I feel that you would better understand the dark depths in my soul than any one else. It is sometimes impossible for me to

believe in a personal God. If He exists and is such as you say, good and righteous, there should not be so much crying misery in the world, so much jarring disharmony in human life.—No, don't attempt to answer me, don't interrupt me, let me speak to a finish now! An other time my thought is bound and my tongue dumb. It is not only here in our family that such an unequal distribution has been made. Look around you in the world at large. How the world is full of unfortunate, misunderstood, despised, poor, and in every way unhappy folks! They have not deserved to suffer above others, but they are forced into suffering and overwhelmed by it. Frequently it overtakes them as irresistably as an avalanche; and they must submit to being crushed beneath it, while others bask in continual sunshine, that makes life an unbroken series of enjoyments for them. And still, in the end, no attention shall be paid to the glaring inequality during life on earth, but only to the fact that some have embraced certain dogmas and held fast to them. And that is to open the portals of Paradise to them—but all others—"

Her emotion overpowered her, and she suddenly stopped.

Judith sat dumb for a moment. Such line of thought was unnatural for this cherished child, who had never experienced anything but love. She must have imbibed these views from somewhere else.



"Nanna," she asked, "have you spoken like that to any of your family?"

Nanna shook her head.

"It may be unfortunate that you haven't. But you must have read some infidel literature?"

"Never!"

"And haven't you met with anyone who has imparted these views to you, which afterwards have assumed definite form and matured in your own judgment?"

Nanna laughed in the midst of tears.

"You look clear through me with those brown eyes of yours," she said. "Well then, listen. When I was in town in order to take gymnastics, I stayed with a woman whose husband was what you call an infidel, and he constantly talked about the anomalies of which life is so full. At first I thought it was terrible to listen to, but gradually it became clear to me that he was right, and I soon accepted his ideas. And after these thoughts once got a foothold, they grew strong, and now I see with my own eyes and not with those of another."

"You consider yourself independent now, but do you know it is only lack of independence? I am greatly surprised that you with your good sense and your Christian education have so easily become a companion of fools!"

"Shame on you, Judith! You are getting to be like the rest. Harsh, unproved statements and self-satisfied, unkind opinions. Is it right to call a

really refined person a fool because he dares to hold independent views?"

"The fool hath said in his heart: 'There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.' It is God's own spirit that utters this opinion, and it can not be overthrown," Judith replied with firmness. "I no longer wonder that you feel unhappy, poor child, when you stand under such an unlycky influence. Did your parents know that that man is an infidel?"

"They did not.—Pshaw—in that case I suppose I would have had to go without gymnastics! But the lady of the house was religious—and of no account besides. But I pity her because he had such an ugly, uncontrollable temper."

"I can well believe that!—Do you suppose an infidel can feel happy or that he can make any one else happy?"

"That is just the point, to view life as it is without trying with the aid of religion to shed an artificial light on it. Tell me the truth, Judith, have you always been happy since you were converted?"

"If I was not always happy it was due to my own failings. And besides a believer may not always feel happy, though he is so in fact."

"Pshaw—talk about being something one does not feel! What is the use? To feel happy is to be happy in my opinion.—If fate will have it so

that I am to go insane, I would rather be a poor lunatic rejoicing in imaginary riches than a rich one who torments himself on account of imaginary poverty. Am I not right?"

"Far from it! Suppose these two lunatics wake up from their dreams and get to see things in their proper light; which one would be the really happy one, humanly speaking?"

"That is simple enough—but—when will such an awakening take place?"

"With all certainty when all day dreams will be dispelled by the light of truth—namely in the existence after death. Falsehood and truth will then be as widely separated as those who have in this life been the children of truth and falsehood."

"If I could be convinced that there is a God, I would give in, but—"

"Well now, if there is no God, then neither is there any Satan. Is that clear?"

Nanna merely shrugged her shoulders.

Judith continued: "And if there is no Satan, whence comes all the evil in the world, which makes people mean, ruined, and unhappy? Or do you believe in a blind fate?"

"Not that either."

"Then what do you believe? If there is no God who has created man, where did he come from? How did man get any good qualities if God did not give them to him? If on the contrary man has sprung into existence without any other cause than

the forces of Nature, he must be such as Nature, or whatever you call it, has made him, and then every human being is devoid of responsibility, whether he be bad or good. And if the principles of good and bad have absolutely no existence then neither god nor bad can exist—and then evil and good are merely a confusion of ideas and are without value. And besides, if there is no God there is no life after this, and then it seems to me that every intelligent man who suffers the consequences of life's vicissitudes ought to end his existence as speedily as possible. Then life isn't even worth living."

"That is to say, you advise me to—you think I ought to take my own life!"

"Yes, provided there is no God, and no life after this, and you dare to do it."

"No, Judith, now you are going too far."

"By no means. I only show the consequences to the limit. Speaking seriously it seems to me that infidels are much worse off than we who believe in a loving God, revealed in Christ Jesus."

Judith felt with regret that her argumentation was weak and defective, and she scarcely dared to meet the penetrating glance of her opponent. Suddenly Nanna got up and passionately threw her arms about Judith's neck.

"Yes, you are better off than I, and I would be like you if I only could."

"And Gunnel?"



"Yes—Gunnel is what she ought to be, although I am mean—"

"Nanna, come down and eat dinner-r-r!" called Lydia from the yard, and Nanna left Judith to herself with her new conflicting impressions.

On leaving, Nanna let Whitis into the room. He jumped into the bed, causing Nanna's portfolio to fall to the floor, and a number of scraps of paper were scattered about.

Judith hastily picked them up. There were not merely patterns. On several leaves were fragments of both poetry and prose, written in Nanna's handsome, vigorous hand.

Judith could not refrain from glancing through some of them. On one leaf was written:

"Eternal unrest in my soul doth dwell,  
That mars my peace and my poor spirit pesters.  
That unrest flows—alas, I know it well—  
From an ill-bandaged wound that bleeds and festers."

Judith read the little stanza twice, laid the paper aside and took another. On it was written:

"Yes, with the blood of my aching heart  
Fain would I mix the tears that start  
Out of my eyes, and drown  
Therein my hope forlorn, still pining,  
Pining for fame and renown,  
Heedless of Fate, its death-doom signing."

Judith read and wondered: Has Nanna written this? Is this a voice from the inner world—a voice

doomed perhaps to die away like a voice in the desert?

Here was another gush of thoughts:

"Thunder-clouds o'er my soul's horizon still lower.  
Still, sad thought! Thou makest me shrink and cower!  
Touch not my heart, that woe encumbers!  
Call not to life its grief that slumbers!  
Long an unequal, hopeless conflict it fought;  
Leave it in peace, since peace in vain it has sought!"

And still more:

"Halt, ye thoughts bizarre, so madly rushing  
Through my brain, becoming spray and foam!  
Why these vain complaints and dirges gushing?  
I was born to pine and pore and roam.  
If a book could soothe me I would rather  
Read than eat, and yet—what can they give?  
No more flowers remain for me to gather,  
Sick and weary, I am loth to live.

Ha! I have it! I will be a writer  
And record the chaos of my thought,  
Search my brain for sparks to make life brighter.  
Faintest light is better still than naught.  
Still I have no fire, and who will lend me  
Means to light my wick, extinct and black?  
Unless heaven deigns a spark to send me,  
Through eternity I'll want and lack."

When Nanna returned after dinner, Judith told her about the mess which the cat had wrought and the result.

Nanna blushed, something that had never occurred since Judith became acquainted with her.

"Are you sorry because I read your verses?"

"Sorry? They won't hurt you, will they?" she replied with a tinge of irony. "I forgot that I had them in the portfolio. I guess you are the first one to read them. Anyhow they are worthless."

"And have you written them yourself?"

"Those things come to me when I am out walking, and I write them down when I come in, although there is no sense in them."

"You might have developed into a writer if you had been allowed to study."

"Don't speak about it, Judith! It is as if you touched an open wound. You see, this idea of greatness, this thirst and longing for an unattained goal that beckons in the distance—a longing to develop into something that is not commonly the lot of country girls—this is my heart disease that makes me rebellious against God and men."

"Have you never spoken to your parents about it?"

"It seems to me they ought to understand it anyhow. But they are so thoroughly practical all of them, and they want to devote to missions all the means that are not indispensable to the farm and the household. Last spring Father received an unlooked-for legacy from America, and then hope began to stir in here—because you see, Father knew what I wanted all right. But then he bought this place, and now—Gunnel is going to

attend a school of missions—and for me he has no funds available.”

“But you must have attended some high school. You so often use expressions and phrases which are quite uncommon with country people. Many of them I can’t understand at all.”

“Not at all—I have only gone through the ordinary public school. But you see I read everything I get hold of, and I not only read but i think and store away. All of that lies in my nature.”

“It’s a pity about you, Nanna—I really do pity you, poor little captive bird of the woods. But I have an idea your parents are acting on inspiration from on high. That your father bought Hedeberga I can not regard otherwise than as providential. God evidently wills that the banner of the cross be planted also in this dark place. And you say Gunnel is going to attend a school of missions?”

“Yes,” replied Nanna with an effort to control her voice. “She intends to become a missionary on the foreign field.”

“Really—she it fitted for that. I assure you it will make you glad some day to hear what a blessing she has been on the mission field. No doubt she has a high and holy mission to fulfill. I suppose your delicate health is one consideration which has made your parents hesitate as to whether it were right to send you to school, as you might easily over-



exert yourself. What, in fact, did you want to prepare yourself for?"

"What? I can hardly say offhand. But I wanted some education—study languages and history, so that I could become a writer—and then to come in contact with kindred spirits and be permitted to look out upon the domains of art and literature."

"Yes, that would not be bad. But then I would rather with Gunnel look out upon the domains of sin and unbelief in order to help in spreading light and life by means of the gospel of salvation by the power of the Holy Ghost."

"It is evident, of course, that you two will hold together, and I will have to go on my way lonely and misunderstood as before."

"Until you lay your hand in Jesus' hand and say to Him: 'Lead me after thy counsel!' and then relinquish all your own thoughts."

"And the dreams of youth?"

"You only need to leave them to Him, and He will provide for their realization in a better way than you could suggest. Then you will be contented and happy, and then you will write songs for our meetings and Sunday school, and your gift will be a sacrifice consecrated to the Lord, my dear little poetess!"

"Would you want to sing my songs?"

"I will sing your songs rather than any others."

"Sing something for me now, Judith."

And Judith sang:

Great God, when I behold the vast creation,  
Which Thou hast wrought by Thy almighty word,  
When I perceive Thine all-wise domination,  
How Thou dost care for man and beast and bird,  
My soul, rejoiced, proclaims thy praise abroad:  
Oh, wondrous God! Oh, wondrous God!

When on the marvels of the sky I ponder,  
Where golden ships the deep-blue ether plow,  
Where sun and moon in peace and concord wander  
And know their time and place, man knows not how,  
My soul, etc.

When I hear thunder from the cloud that lowers,  
And hissing lightnings pierce the gloomy sky,  
When, as the rain descends in gentle showers  
The rain-bow of the covenant I spy,  
My soul, etc.

When o'er the fields the breeze of summer rushes  
And gorgeous flow'rs their fragrant odors waft,  
When from the woods I hear the song of thrushes  
Borne back from crag and rock with echoes soft,  
My soul, etc.

When I hear dull, presumptuous fools descanting,  
Denying God and scoring His commands,  
Themselves in need, yet other men supplanting,  
And fed like them, by God's almighty hands,  
My soul, etc.

When, born a man, I see how God assembles  
The sick and poor and helps them everywhere,  
When I see death o'ercome and Satan tremble—  
And Him the palm of resurrection bear,  
My soul, etc.

When, torn with sin, my heart within me bleedeth  
And at His feet I beg for peace and grace,  
And in His holy path my steps He leadeth  
And saves from sin and helps me run the race,  
My soul, etc.

And when at last the veils of time are falling  
And unseen hope is turned to present sight,  
When I perceive the bells of heaven calling  
My ransomed soul to peace and glory bright,  
My raptured soul will sing these words abroad:  
I praise Thee, God! I praise Thee, God!

The beautiful, poetic words impressed the young poetess. The ice was broken, and she became communicative. She allowed her newly acquired friend to look into the depths of her "chaos," as she termed those half uncomprehended thoughts, feelings, and impressions which bring so much suffering to a highly poetic nature as long as it is not understood and has no facilities for development.

She drew Judith along into the mystic silence of the words, into the weird, moonlit jungle of the autumn night, where plaintive hobgoblins secreted themselves in the shadows and the birds of the night hooted their prophecies of evil and their songs of grief. She took her along to hear the waves of the lake sing their primeval memories and confess to the fading flowers misdeeds, committed centuries ago. She made her see how the stars of heaven wept in the night—wept clear dewy tears over the immeasurable sin and guilt of the earth.

She likewise gave her a peep into a desolated garden of roses—a young, warmly pulsating heart, where nevertheless all singing spring life must die down, all germinating vital force must be smothered by the hand of materialism and then ill health.

“Say, but you must stop now, Nanna, or you will make me crazy.”

“I wish you were as crazy as I, for then we would sing a song of life in both major and minor key.”

“What then do you want to go to school for? You express yourself in an obscure maner as it is, it seems to me.”

“Obscure! Now you hit the nail on the head! You see, if I had a school education it would solve the difficulties and bring clearness and order. To have in the mind a lot of thoughts, conceptions and perceptions, to which one is unable to give form in proper expression is like exerting the respiratory organs when there is a lack of air. All of this an education would remedy. To have a sense of constant suffocation that—”

“Don’t cry, my dear little poetess! I fully believe that God will let you get your breath, if He—”

“Exists, you mean,” Nanna filled in, wiping away her tears. “If not, I guess I had better take your advice and get myself out of the difficulty.”



I would rather be dead than have this tormenting weariness of life—”

“Now you must not talk about weariness of life. No doubt you believe there is a God who helps, although you like to fuss a little.”

Lydia's plump, childlike face appeared in the door-way.

“Nanna, Uncle and Aunt are ready to leave, and they want to say good-bye to you.” Her mellow voice always had something of music in it.

Nanna laid her work down with a sigh.

“I guess I won't come up anymore this evening. Thanks for to-day!”

Judith sat absorbed in thought. She had gotten a glimpse of a new world, which before had been to her a land of the unknown, but of which she seemed to have a recollection from the mysterious land of dreams. There was a correspondence between herself and the uncommunicative girl, that was evident. They could not but react on each other. Both had been in a way separated from other people and lived in a world of their own. But for Judith it had changed. There had come a radiance over her life and a power that mightily broke through her weakness. She must and she would be something for this girl, with whom she seemed to be in closer spiritual kinship than with others, although there was not between them this inner bond of union which is a fruit of the Spirit.

When would the golden key be ready?

She sat a while as if she had listened to a whispering from an unseen being. Then she went to her dresser, opened a little drawer and took out a folded paper, yellow with age and worn out in the creases. It was an old passion hymn, translated from the Italian, which she had copied out of a periodical many years since.

She knelt by the sofa with the little hymn in her hands, which she stretched heavenward, and cried to God from the depth of her heart that this hymn might become the golden key that could open a poor young heart struggling for divine light and heaven-born peace. In spite of the urgent work she sat down at the table and copied it on a clean sheet of paper.

When in Gethsemane wrestling,  
Watching and praying and weeping,  
Blood from my sweat-pores was seeping  
Know it was streaming for thee  
Thee—yet who knows if it brought  
Ever a serious thought!

Only an angel could number,  
Only in heaven 'ts written  
With what deep stripes I was smitten  
Smitten and wounded for thee—  
Thee, etc.

Crowned, with a reed for my sceptre,  
With the sharp thorns they had plaited,  
Hailed, yet insulted and hated,  
Then I was thinking of thee  
Thee, etc.

Tried and condemned without mercy,  
Under the cross-burden sinking,  
Yet not from Golgatha shrinking,  
All have I suffered for thee.  
Thee, etc.

Nails through my body were driven,  
Wrath was poured out like an ocean,  
Torments of Hell were my portion,  
Death have I suffered for thee—  
Thee, etc.

And when my bosom was riven  
That still heart with pure love bursting  
Gushed forth a fount for the thirsting,  
Shedding its life-blood for thee—  
Thee, etc.

Say, is my love worth receiving?  
Seeing the stripes that were given?  
Have I yet fruitlessly striven—  
Fruitlessly striven for thee—  
Thee, etc.

Dying I asked of My Father  
Pardon for all thy transgression.  
Scorn not that meek intercession,  
It is salvation for thee—  
Thee, etc.

Trembling, the earth and the heaven  
Showed me their heartfelt compassion,  
When in this terrible fashion  
I was forsaken—for thee—  
Thee, etc.

I was thy friend and thy brother,  
Still as thy God I am able,  
When thou hast come to My table  
There to be present with thee.  
Thee, etc.

Tell me, what more could I offer?  
By my own mercy incited  
The human and godlike united  
Have wrought salvation for thee.  
Thee, etc.

Yes, I was dead, but I've risen,  
Ever in heaven I'm living,  
Still interceding and giving  
Faith and repentance to thee—  
Thee, etc.

Thinking of thee when I suffered,  
Now, as in heaven I'm reigning,  
Still the same spirit retaining,  
Ever I'm thinking of thee.  
Thee, etc.

Then Judith laid the paper, which was of a crimson color, among the other papers in Nanna's portfolio.

"God, let this love speak more powerfully to her heart than my poor words can do!" she sighed.

Later in the evening Nanna came for her portfolio. She was to try to draw a monogram on cloth according to Judith's instruction by perforating the outlines with a needle and brushing potato



meal over it. This was a novel experiment for the girl and tempted her enterprise.

On the following day Nanna did not come at the usual hour. This caused uneasiness to Judith, who could not refrain from looking out through the window. Finally she came, and Judith noticed that the girl, contrary to custom, had an agitated appearance.

"Nanna, how are you?" asked Judith.

"How am I?—Just as you wanted me to be, you innocent dove with the cunning of a serpent," replied the girl with an attempt at smiling, but suddenly she threw herself on her knees beside Judith and hid her face in her lap, while she was convulsed with sobs.

"Nanna!"

"Judith!—They are torn down altogether, irreparably and completely—all the defenses of unbelief—all rational theories! I got hold of that red thing — — that you had smuggled in — — and such a night as I have had! That red thing has stood before me like the reflection of a love that suffered death, a blood that was shed for me.—It has overpowered me and made me small as a mite—. How glad I am that Gunnel slept like a good child!"

"Oh, Nanna!"

"No—don't interrupt me. I have a long confession to make," continued the girl without lifting her face out of Judith's lap. "Judith, how could

I go so long a time with blindfolded eyes—so persistently and self-determinedly blind, that I have not seen this? How could I ignore so much love and say so many bitter things against God! Will He forgive all this? If I had sinned ignorantly — — but this premeditated resistance and conceited arguing against God's word and providence!—All seems to me more than the most blood-red sins. I shall never get peace for this.”

Judith caressed her light hair, while her own tears dropped on the kneeling girl—tears of the sweetest joy. It seemed as if her bosom would be burst by the new, powerful spring sap that bubbled and throbbed within. She was almost amazed. The golden key to the jewel chest had been found.

“Nanna, my beloved child, listen to what He Himself says: ‘Peace I leave unto you; My peace I give unto you.’ Your sins, of whatsoever kind they be, He blotteth out like a cloud and a mist...”

“Sins, oh yes, but unbelief—conscious, deliberate unbelief! It isn't the sins, but unbelief that condemns me. I have been hard and shown contempt against Him; will He not turn me away with hardness and contempt in return when I come and ask forgiveness? What a man soweth, that shall he also reap—isn't that so?”

“No, He will not turn you away with hardness and contempt, dear child. Is not unbelief a sin for which He has suffered death—which was contained in the handwriting which was against us, and which

He has nailed to the cross? 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out,' the Master says."

"I suppose you think that all my unbelief has disappeared all of a sudden, my dear Judith, but there is still much of it left."

"I don't suppose anything of the kind. I know that much about the human heart, I can assure you. Especially it isn't likely to go any too easy for a such little trouble maker as you are. But do you really want to? There's where the hitch comes."

"Of course I want to, else I wouldn't have said anything to you. Oh, it is fearful to live as an enemy of God and feel as if one were an outcast from His face, to be an object of the wrath of Jesus and never give Him a friendly thought. Have I not crucified Him afresh with my rebellious and hostile mind? I feel as if He would say: 'Now it is my turn to be rebellious. Depart—' "

"That He will by no means do. Not a bit of it! Never mind how it appears to you or how you feel about it. Just hold fast to His word and insist on being wholly on Jesus' side, in spite of all inward resistance, and on entrusting your life in His hands and you will not fail to get peace. He will do it."

"But I must not only ask God for forgiveness, I must also ask Father and Mother and Gunnel to forgive me. That I must do, my dear Judith?"

"Is that so difficult?"

"For the old Nanna, yes—but the new Nanna

will feel her heart warm up when it is done. I have seen many tears and heard many heavy sighs, I can tell you, and well I know that they concerned me. How novel it will be once in life to see them rejoice over me!"

"Shall we kneel down and give thanks to God, Nanna?"

"We will put that off till I am a little more sure of myself and order is restored within. All is confusion—."

"It is a blessed confusion, my little Nanna. Let God Himself bring order out of this confusion; no one else can do it. We will not put it off! He shall have the thank offering of our hearts just now."

And so they kneeled in prayer. And Nanna was surprised at the peace and quiet that settled over the confusion within—just as the rays of the sun cause the ice and snow and frost to melt away in the spring time.

In this wonderful manner the week of moonlight was changed into the brightest sunshine. And great was the joy of the whole household at Hedeberga that the golden key had been found and the jewel casket opened, so that the glittering gems which had lain buried in darkness could reflect the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, which shone in these with salvation—under His wings.



## CHAPTER VII.

### Spring Time in Late Autumn.

THE days grew more and more bleak and dismal. The cold autumn rain drizzled continuously against the window pane, and the clouds hung heavy and motionless even down to the tree-tops, as it seemed. The air was raw and chilly—just the weather to make one feel melancholy and make life appear dreary. Everything in nature more and more took on the monotonous, colorless appearance that characterizes late fall and which makes one almost long for the pure white winter covering. But while autumn was plundering and desolating like a veritable robber chieftain outside, a new spring life bloomed and shed its fragrance within the humble limits of Hedeberga and even spread further in the vicinity.

Nanna's altered views of life and life aim caused unmingled joy in her home as well as in Judith who had been the means of bringing it about. The sewing circles were faithfully attended though as yet not by a great number, for all knew that only religious people were attending, and none other presumed to go. The Sunday school was the most prosperous, for it was attended not only by little

folks but also by big folks, mostly attracted by Judith's beautiful, sympathetic song, and later more and more by the powerful attraction of the word of God. Ivarsson and Gunnel took turns in studying the text with the children, and it fell to Nanna's lot to relate a story, which she did in a descriptive manner peculiar to herself. All this was novel to the neighbors, who often followed the example of the children and thought it was a joy to gather with them. Thus people soon came in such numbers that Ivarssons large house proved to be too small to accomodate all.

Public meetings were also frequently arranged when some traveling preacher would be present to speak or Ivarsson himself would, according to the grace given to him, expound the Scriptures. On all such occasions the house was overfilled with people.

Pretty soon the rumor spread like wild-fire that the foreman at Skuggvik, Andrew Enkel, and one of the tenants of the old manor, Nils from Grankasa, had joined the believers, and this bit of news caused a tremendous excitement, for in that vicinity nothing of the nature of a spiritual revival had ever been heard of. The few believers of the locality had rather unnoticed taken their present stand. This new order of things soon led to secret and open hostility, and the opposition had its foremost champions in a group of young rascals who acted the part of disturbers at the meetings and

molested the people when they late at night returned to their homes. Soon the enmity to Christ took on the aspect of admonitions from those in office, church council decrees and prohibiting orders. These were intended to serve as water on the fire, but instead they acted as oil.

Ivarsson, however, kept on, calm in the consciousness of his Christian right and duty and courageous in faith to labor for the salvation of souls. He was joined by some of the men of the community, who had long been followers of the Lord in secret, but not till now had their eyes opened to their duty to show their colors and be lights in the world. The question of building a mission house found more and more response among them. Greatest was the joy when first one, then another of the disturbers fell victims to the sword of the Spirit.

This was a spring-time full of life and promise, while autumn spread death and desolation in nature.

So the 24th of October dawned. Already at dawn the clouds showed a tendency to part and give the sun a chance to let his shining face once more look out on the tear-drenched earth.

A hitched-up dray wagon stood in front of the door of the old house at Hedeberga, and Ivarsson himself, assisted by a laborer and his two oldest boys, carried Judith's furniture, one piece after the

other, down the rickety steps and loaded them into the wagon. Gunnel and Nanna were up there and helped Judith to take the more fragile objects from the walls and shelves and to pack them carefully in a large basket. Even little Lydia showed herself capable of helping and Whitis ran officiously back and forth between the two buildings, as if he were doing most of the moving. It was no trouble at all to get the things in and everything in its right place in the light, beautiful gable room, where no one needed to fear that he would bump his head against the rafters.

It was Friday, and the following day Judith for the first time was to be hostess for the sewing circle. She had worked and saved in order to be able to treat the dear co-laborers to coffee and a simple lunch. Maja-Lisa had already had the sewing circle in her homely cottage, and now Judith wished to dedicate her new abode with this kind of meeting.

She was just standing on a step ladder in front of the wide window, hanging up her new-laundered curtains, which proved to be entirely too short here, but which she had neatly lengthened out with bits of old ones, hidden by the broad curtain holders. She had acquired a youthfulness with life and color, and the new, cozy dwelling seemed to have given her a new view of life. It was an entirely different Judith from what it had been. Sunshine had come and brought life in her withered



garden, and she was conscious of it and thanked God for it.

A gentle knock was heard at the door, and Nanna's face appeared. She exhibited a still more thorough change, wrought in this brief period. It seemed as if a statue of yellow marble had been endowed with life and circulation, causing a crimson, active element to shine through the pale exterior. She smiled and rhymed:

It is Nanna, fun creating,  
As she used to do.  
For the coffee pot it waiting,  
Bright and warm, for you.

Don't believe that I would fool you,  
Mamma says: Come down.  
Hurry, Judith, or I'll pull you,  
Drag you by the gown.

"What? Coffee again? That will never do. You spoil me entirely."

Let me hear no "but or if,"  
Come with Whities in a jiff!

"You little poetess! I can't keep you under my thumb any longer. I just have to obey your slightest nod!"

"Rhyming chronicle would be a more fitting name, for my poetry isn't of much account. But perhaps by and by—"

'Your muse you will try.'

"But then you must not become proud on that account," continued Judith laughing.

"You are a more clever rhymester than I. But come now, else mother will get impatient, which, however, when I think of it, is not very probable."

"But where did you get your poetic vein, Nanna? It isn't inherited?"

"Oh yes, it is inherited, but—" Nanna was absorbed in thought and forgot to finish the sentence.

"You mean to say from the Lord—certainly not from your father."

"Oh, Father, he is the genuine, practical prose, body and soul, as you must have noticed. But have you never looked into Mother's eyes. Don't you see that a captive bird peeps out at the windows now and then, furtively though it may be? But you see, that bird is so accustomed to being caged that he doesn't cause much of an uproar. Habit soon becomes second nature. Mine, on the contrary, is of a more ungovernable nature and shakes the bars of the cage, so they clatter, and when he has exhausted himself by his vain efforts, he tries to 'die in beauty,' as is the fashion nowadays. But he fails in that too and leads a hopeless life. It used to be that way, as you know, but now he is tamed and leaves me in peace to some extent."

"He ought soon to be set free from captivity and be allowed to live in the free air of heaven

and sing his Maker's praise," said Judith with emotion.

In the newly scrubbed sitting room the coffee table with fresh coffee bread awaited them. Mother Tilda smiled pleasantly at the two girls, when they entered and went to the kitchen to get the coffee pot. With a new interest Judith eyed the pale, gentle matron, who moved so deliberately and thoughtfully in the midst of her household duties as if these had been her vital element. But when she looked deeper into these somewhat wandering, blue-gray eyes, she found that they had the same far-off look as Nanna's although this expression was more tender and womanly, so to speak. She was wholly engrossed in her husband and children and the many diversified duties which fall to the lot of a wife and mother and probably no longer felt any regret for a more intellectual life work, as Nanna. Gunnel, though practical, enterprising, and energetic like her father, had, she too, something of the dream nature, but in her it found expression in a purely spiritual way, and she often "saw visions," as her father used to express it.

"And to-morrow you will come up to me for coffee—won't that be fun!" said Judith, as she stood with her hand on the door-knob ready to go to her room. I wonder if the lady from Markerud will dare to go out now, since the moon has gone down and the nights are so dark."

"Oh, she isn't at all timid! Besides she can stay

here over Sunday as she did the last time," comforted Gunnel.

"And Maja-Lisa will stay with me. Mother Annika won't venture out this time on account of the roads being so muddy and bad."

"What a fine time we shall have with my Golden Key! That will be something non plus ultra! But what are we working for? We have as yet no mission society to give our contribution to. If we had a definite purpose and aim we would work with greater energy, don't you think so?"

Yes, Nanna was right. They ought to have a definite aim to work for, and all the participants ought to have a clear understanding of this aim, for which they were sacrificing time and money.

Why not form a mission society that could connect itself with some already existing larger mission societies and arrange it so that travelling ministers might oftener visit in this locality?

"Have we nothing to learn in this matter, nothing that could give us members an insight into missions and their necessity?" asked Nanna with unusual eagerness.

"Indeed we have," replied Gunnel, "we have periodicals on missions, and also books on the subject."

"Then we will appoint Nanna as reader," suggested Judith.

"Nothing of that kind! We will elect Judith, who has such clear organs of speech and such a



fine pronounciation and says 'kott' and 'svatt' and 'bott' instead of 'kort' and 'svart' and 'bort,' and so on, and so on."

Judith laughed and remonstrated, but Nanna was inexorable.

When Judith came up to her room she stood in front of the window and looked out over the fields. It was quite a different view from what she had been accustomed to for a long time, with the thatched out-buildings that shut off the view toward the great spruce forest with its sombre beauty. Here was an open view across yellow fields and leafless patches of woods, with borrowed hues from the reddish light of the setting sun. Beyond lay the lake in mirror-like calm, reflecting from its glittering deep the lurid sunlight, mixed with the purple of the sunset sky. In the midst of the lake was an island, covered with tall, dark fir trees, which made a good effect and gave the picture a deeply serious and romantic character. On the right hand shore, between the leafless trees, the dark, steep roof of Skuggvik's old main building was visible. This was the prettiest part of the scenery, and Judith, who loved everything pretty, was charmed at having this captivating scenery before her eyes. It would be an acceptable relief to them after being too long fixed on her sewing. She scarce knew herself how receptive her mind was to the beauties of nature, till she had a chance to enjoy some of it. Now it seemed incomprehensible to her how she

could have lived and existed so long in the hovel yonder, which had already that day lost its old roof.

Her belongings, simple but well taken care of, also looked altogether different in this light, airy room, where everything had an aristocratic appearance. And then the large, neat attic with its roof-window and the girl's room opposite. To converse with one another they only needed to open their doors. What excellent provision her heavenly Father had made for her! Never had she thought that she would in this life feel so full of peace and joy as she felt at this moment.

The sewing circle began to assemble immediately after one o'clock. The membership had been increased by four persons: Mother Lisa from Gran-kasa, two girls from Dalbrona, Hilma and Gärda, and no less a personage than the redoubtable Miss Marie Charlotte Divén, house keeper at Skuggvik, who out of sheer curiosity had accompanied the girls to a meeting one evening and then was won for the higher life. But before that she had, through the courageous testimony and consecrated life of the servant maids, had the blessed hunger and thirst after righteousness awakened in her soul.

The two sisters from Dalbrona were the much spoken of leaders of fashion in the locality, and the popular verdict was that they were "awfully stuck-up." Now they came plain and humble, and

asked if the might join the sewing circle. They asked Judith to please be kind enough to cut out a combing jacket for each of them. They had the material with them. Hitherto they had treated her with haughty condescension, and she had had no customers that were harder to please than those two. But still greater was Judith's surprise when old Mother Britta's familiar wrinkled face with the kindly eyes and the little toothless mouth appeared.

She had heard so much both good and bad concerning these meetings, she said, and now she wanted to see for herself, with her own eyes, what they were doing. "And being that the meeting was to be held at the home of an old acquaintance—and then I suppose there would always be use for socks—if they can't sell them there is always some poor fellow to give them to."

And so the knitting needles were soon in the liveliest of motion. Judith had all she could do with cutting, stitching, and supervising the work. And when it came to selecting a supervisor Judith obtained all the votes.

Mother Tilda had taken charge of the preparation of coffee, and the girls had set the coffee table in their room. Little Lydia sat with her crocheting and had put on a becoming serious air. Sitting still, however, became monotonous, and therefore she often made herself errands into her sister's room, where she was greatly interested

in counting how many kinds of cake they were to have to their coffee.

It was a blessed sewing circle; so every one thought. No man was present, hence several of the women ventured to pray aloud before the Bible reading began. A good, heartfelt spirit ruled among the working sisters. Gunnel read a chapter in the Bibel. Judith and several others sang some devotional songs, and Nanna read a couple of mission-stories. The question of the formation of a mission society was also discussed with much interest, and those of the women who had not even known what a mission society is, now received the desired information. The final decision of this question was left to the men, who were to have a meeting and consider this matter the same evening.

Mother Britta for the most part sat quietly listening, but when the sewing circle had adjourned for the evening and every one was ready to go home she said to Judith:

"We've had a good time with you. I expect I'll come again some time. And—it isn't farther to my place than you can come there and sew another time."

And as Mother Britta said so was it decided.

"The sewing circle in your home, Judith, was the best of all," said Nanna, when the three girls had seen the mistress and the girls from the manor to the very garden gate.

"Why so?" asked Judith.



"Because I could take part with my whole heart this time," replied the girl thoughtfully, as she looked skyward.

Up there hung the moon, cold and clear, and poured its silvery light over the frozen earth. The frost-bitten grass glittered and sparkled in faint rainbow hues in the moonlight. The evening was cold, and Nanna shivered now and then as she walked close to Judith.

"You are not rhyming to-night, Nanna; you must be cold," said Gunnel, approaching her sister.

"No—there would be too much rime then. I think there is enough already," replied the girl with a smile. "But come here, you big sunshine, and the rime will melt. Oh, how warm you are!"

"And you are so cold, you poor little thing! But how strong you are compared with what you were before, Nanna!"

"Yes," replied Nanna absentmindedly, "the bondage of sin and death once o'er, the body is strengthened more and more."

Judith and Gunnel glanced at each other with a furtive smile, for they realized that Nanna was unconsciously rhyming.

"God is good," said Gunnel warmly.

"But what are you laughing at, folks?"

"We smiled because of the pretty rime that was made without your noticing it," laughed Judith.

"But lo and behold—oh!" The girl faced the lake absorbed in contemplation.

"What is it, Nanna?"

"What is it? How can you ask? Have you ever seen anything more beautiful, you every-day folks? Don't you see how the moon every-days? Don't you see how the moonbeams rock and rock to and fro on the waves? See how the entire lake glitters and gleams in blue and silver. And out there floats Klosterholmen in the water's edge with its black fir trees like a sombre nightly fairy tale—. Do you know what? There must be some mystery hidden beneath the deep shadows in there, a poetic mystery which it will be given to me to reveal, or perhaps a sombre one, that will some day leave its impress on my life."

"Say, Nanna, you are going into ecstasies, and the result will be a cold if you stand here any longer."

"Judith, do you know what? Father has promised me that I can go to the academy in—if I am good, that means if I get strong enough. What do you think? Is it strange that I see everything with transformed eyes? Won't you rejoice with me?"

"You, you little moonlight poem. If I did not want you to get the wish of your heart, I would sit down and weep when I get home."

"Weep!—Why?"

"When the 'poetry of every day life' glides from me and only the prose remains. And then Gunnel is going to the school of missions—. How

in all the world is life going to look then?" said Judith, more disconsolate than she would have it appear.

"Then you will have to be both the sunshine and moonlight," replied the two sisters at once.

"How you talk! And think of Mother Tilda. How is she going to get along all alone? That is more than I can understand."

"She has old Nilsby-guten to attend to the barnyard, as you know, and then she will have a girl to help indoors, of course."

"But at that—think how lonesome she will feel."

"She has Father and the smaller children, and then she has a share in a gold mine, as you will understand by and by."

"Say, but listen—"

"No, listen! Promise us, Judith, that you will stand as a faithful friend by Mamma's side when we have gone each our own way. Will you promise?"

"Dear me, it would be my duty to do more than you ask of me. I am indebted to you for both spiritual and temporal aid. You know you can count on me, that I will be and do all that God gives me grace to be and do."

"Thanks, Judith! You are a woman of character, we know that. Then we need not be uneasy."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### **An Unexpected Meeting.**



SPRING—what gushing life, what mighty powers, in process of development, what a world of dim expectancy and undenied longing is not contained in this little word! How full of pleasant reveries is not a sunny evening in spring with its mild air, its springing blades of grass, its budding trees, and cheery singing of birds!

Just such an evening Judith stood at the window in her room and looked out upon green tinted field and woods, where the incipient verdure seemed inlaid with gold in the bright sunshine. The lake lay blue and calm beyond the fields and underbrush and seemed full of bright spring smiles.

It was Saturday night, and Judith had early returned from the sewing circle in Dalbrona in order to help Mother Ivarsson, who was not feeling well that day. Now Judith was at leisure for the evening after putting her room in the comeliest of order with violets and buttercups in the vases on the dresser, and now she had time to think.

It was a year and a half since she had moved into this light room, and ever since her life also



had been light, although little passing shadows now and then had arisen, only to make the light spots a little lighter. How different many things had become during this period, the happiest of her life! God had clearly given his approval of the labors of His few children, and a vigorous spiritual life had sprung into bloom in this formerly dark and unfruitful locality. The mission house stood ready and newly painted yonder on the hill among dark, young spruces and light birches. It was spring-time also in a spiritual sense. Salvation-hungry crowds of people streamed to the mission house every Sunday and even occasionally on the week days. The Sunday school and the sewing circles became more and more frequented, and many young people, who had wearied of an empty, grasping, worldly life, came and asked if they might participate in the work.

Judith had her hands full, for after Gunnel's departure she had taken her place in the Sunday school, and in everything and by everybody her personal assistance was demanded. All ennui had disappeared, and the weariness which she sometimes felt was merely bodily. She experienced a literal fulfillment of the words of the Lord: "Thy youth is renewed like an eagle's." Her appearance showed this. Mother Tilda also took care that her pantry should not be empty, for she knew, she said, what may happen to a poor seamstress. Thus these two helped one another.

It was a happy life, though tinged with melancholy because of the absence of "the big sunshine" and the "rhyming chronicle," both of whom, however, wrote long letters about longing for home and hopes for the future. Judith vividly remembered the day of their departure. How serious Gunnel was, and how radiant Nanna! She had certainly no cause for wishing, as she had once said to Judith:

"I should like to have another appearance, when I come out among people, than I have—"

"You certainly have no reason to wish anything like that, dear Nanna—your little round face with its tender, child-like expression."

"Tender, child-like—yes, there we have it! I don't complain of being ugly, exactly, but would like to have something piquant, something characteristic, something different from the usual round-cheeked country-girl type—a bolder cut profile or a more unusual physiognomy. Such a fine, clean-cut face as yours, with brown, intelligent eyes, would be more suitable for a poetess than my round, inexpressive one. Even a lean, angular one like Malla Söder's would be more suitable—"

"Be careful, Nanna! You may some day have to regret that your face has become lean and angular like that. You had better be satisfied with your appearance."

"Oh, yes, honestly, I never will really worry about anything so superficial as my looks, if only

my soul were a mirror for the fairest among the children of men. And you know how full I am of foolish notions."

Judith was in such a singular mood this evening. The air was full of forebodings, and an undefined fear that something might happen that would bring her back to the past settled over her joyous memories like a mist on a smiling landscape. It seemed as if her old longing for an unattained goal would again overtake her.

She took her hymn book from the shelf, turned the leaves for a moment, and then she let her soft, bell-like tones fill the room:

"Not for earthly name and treasure,  
Gracious Lord, to Thee I pray;  
Not in earthly, passing pleasure  
Would I spend life's fleeting day—  
Draw Thou me  
Close to Thee—  
Gladly will I all things suffer  
For a closer walk with Thee."

She was interrupted by a rather sharp knock at the door.

"Come in!"

A man with a fine and still youthful appearance, dark brown hair and moustache, and dressed in an elegant traveling suit, appeared in the doorway with an air of indecision. When he spied Judith his face brightened, he closed the door behind him, and advanced a few steps into the room.

Judith hastily closed the hymn book and laid it aside, as the strange visitor shyly extended his hand.

"Do you recognize me?" he asked with a quaver in his voice.

"John Thyreus," she replied calmly and extended her hand in reply.

What an imposing figure he made! He was highly colored and fleshy—much more than suited Judith's taste.

She invited him to a seat, and he seated himself comfortably on the little couch, just as if he had been at home there, and asked her to be seated by his side.

He was come, he said, to ask her forgiveness for the past. He had had no peace of mind during all these years after breaking their engagement because she would not leave her mother. He with his respectable family connections and bright prospects for the future did not then want to come in close touch with a woman of such doubtful character as Judith's mother. So they parted. But he who was responsible for this parting had lost most thereby, although his future looked brighter than hers. He had lost not only his peace of conscience, but the noblest woman's love and the happiness he had dreamt of at her side. He had married a wealthy girl, but was now a widower for two years and had two little girls. A couple of older children had died in infancy. Would Judith now forgive him



and become his second wife, although he once had been foolish enough to allow himself not to make her his first wife?

Judith sat silent and meditated a while, and the changing color of the friend of her youth reflected the uncertainty of her answer.

He had forsaken her because she had refused to forsake. Was *that* the character of a rightminded man? Would she be able to trust him now, since he had, just when she needed his support the most, so coldly and selfishly failed her? Was he a man of other principles now? Was his repentance genuine, or was his offer a ruse in order to get a reliable person to look after his house?

Her reply was deliberate, mature. She had long since forgiven him. There was no thorn left from the old pain, but it was best not to tear up that which was forgotten and forgiven. She had reached the age where the question of matrimony was a thing of the past. He ought to look for a wife with youth and future prospects.

No—he would have none beside her! He knew full well that no one else could make him truly happy in life. He owned a fine, well furnished home, and had a good income. She would want nothing—love, respect, wealth—all would be hers. And his twin girls—just two years old—sweet little angels, but motherless, how they would love her, the unselfish and self-sacrificing—

Judith's heart grew soft like wax before the sun.

Oh, these little girls, his little girls, they would also become hers—.

A warm current of life permeated her whole being and was plainly reflected in her countenance.

She wanted to say something, but she suddenly restrained herself, and the words died on her lips.

"Judith, why don't you answer?" he asked in an agitated manner.

"John, I have given myself up to Jesus, wholly and without reserve. He is my Lord and my God, my life and my happiness."

"You can do that for all I care. I am not jealous of Him," he replied with an awkward laugh, which made a disagreeable impression on Judith. "Have you turned religious?" he added in a somewhat chill manner.

"I believe that God has forgiven my sins and my forgetfulness of Him, and I am washed in the blood of the Lamb. And you, John?"

He made an evasive motion with his head

"You can believe anything you want to for all I care," he said with a somewhat supercilious air, "just as I want to have my own convictions to myself. We need never quarrel about that. I respect your belief just as you do mine. Every one is saved by his own faith. That is my belief."

"But not mine. I believe what God says in His word. And His words are these, 'He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life; but he that be-

lieveth not in the Son shall not see life, but God's wrath abideth over him.' "

"Yes," he said in a careless tone. "I understand how it is. You have a more concentrated personal conception of God, while my conception of Him has a much wider scope, and besides is more up-to-date," he added with a smile.

Judith had again grown very pale during the latter part of the conversation.

No, no!—their paths must still henceforth run apart through life. There was too much that separated them. But the two twin girls—oh, they had a right to grow up in a different atmosphere.

"If you would send them here and let me take care of them!" she said entreatingly. "I would care for them as tenderly as ever a mother could do."

"Now you are talking vagaries, Judith! It is *I* who need you in my home, where my children have their proper place. I wouldn't part with my children," he exclaimed vehemently and rose from the couch.

He too had turned very pale.

"Stay and have a cup of coffee! I will have it ready directly."

"No, thanks! I drank coffee at the inn just before I came here. You are poor, Judith," he said with a quavering voice, as he put his hand in the inside pocket of his coat.

Judith turned crimson.

"John Thyreus!" she exclaimed with darting

eyes and tremulous voice, "you are poorer than I. You have only your temporal riches, and they will not go with you across the river of doubt, but as a child of the personal God I am heir to the kingdom of God."

"Good-bye, Judith. Live happily. We shall never meet agin", he said in a broken voice as he turned toward the door.

"Oh John!—are we to part forever?" There lay a compressed anguish in this question—a question that got no reply—and he was gone.

Judith herself wondered that she took this so calmly. This was the second time that she had conquered herself, but how much easier it was now than the first time!

"I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me," she thought, and fervently thanked God that He had saved her from being unequally yoked with an unbeliever.

But still the impression of this meeting stood like a sombre shadow between her and the calm and peace which she had before experienced beneath the wings of God.



## CHAPTER IX.

### The Three "Hedeberga Girls."

**I**T was a beautiful summer day, with the sun sinking low in the west. It had been cloudy and threatening during the day, but the clouds had softly glided away and packed themselves into a dense wall above the eastern mountains, which were brightly lit up by the sunshine and took on the finest hues of crimson, violet, blue-gray, and gray. On the broad sidewalk on the south road in G. there walked with measured steps a gentleman and a lady, accompanied by two little girls, who were clad in cream-colored apparel from head to foot, and who fluttered on like two butterflies.

The lady, who seemed to be about forty years of age, looked elegant in her pretty but extremely simple promenade dress. Her features were regular, and a slight plumpness gave to her face and figure a youthful appearance. The gentleman at her side had a distinguished look and a healthy complexion and wore a fine, well fitting costume. They slowly promenaded past one villa after the other, that lay imbedded in the luxuriant summer verdure. A recent rain had washed the dust from the trees and flowering shrubs, and the sun glittered and

gleamed in the still adhering raindrops. Here and there a spire rose out of the leafy bed. Here and there a window, surrounded with trailing vines, peeped forth. And above the vine-covered balconies were ornamental hanging baskets with dark red pelargonias and blue lobelias suspended with invisible chains. Summer flowers in gorgeous colors shone and sent up their perfume from fine, velvet-like lawns, fountains hurled their glittering cascades into the air, and the trushes sang among the oak trees on the crest of the hill to the east. The promenaders did not seem to pay much attention to the gorgeous splendor with which they were surrounded but conversed eagerly with each other in low tones.

"No—we will walk. It is such a lovely evening, and I need exercise—and it is only a short distance to the cross-roads. Are you tired, little ones?"

"No! We run faster than Ma and Pa. See, we'll run a race with the street car!"

The children darted away like a gust of wind, and the gentleman and the lady also quickened their steps. Ere long they turned in at the cross road, crossing the bridge over the river, which flowed underneath, sluggish, dark, and foul smelling. The pedestrians hurried back and forth on the wide road between the villas, where carriages, rolled, wagons rattled, and horsemen rode in a gallop on shining, light-footed steeds. But the

stately lady seemed to pay no attention to the busy life round about her but seemed to be occupied by a single thought.

"I hope we haven't delayed too long, so that we arrive late?" she said as she looked inquiringly into the gentleman's face.

The gentleman took up his gold watch.

"No danger; we have a quarter of an hour," he said. "We have plenty of time."

"But my dear little ones, aren't you tired now?"

"No! We are not tired at all. Mama, did you see that pretty cat inside the gate to Jakobsdal? He had three colors, and he looked at us as if he wanted to say, 'Come on and play with us.'"

They walked by Ö—s old church with the enchanting graveyard, dreaming in shadows and silence, where the dead sleep, watched by winged marble angels and covered by a gorgeous wealth of flowers—then they took the road that runs parallel with the railway toward G—a. On nearing the little station they heard a shrill, prolonged whistle, accompanied by an increasing thunder-like roar, which informed them that they had arrived just at the right moment. As the steam-horse slowed up and stopped directly in front of the station, panting, blowing, and snorting, the door of a coach was suddenly opened and two young ladies in light summer dresses and with boquets of flowers in their hands hastily stepped out, and the

train rushed on, leaving a dense black trail of smoke behind.

The two young ladies were received with evident emotion and joy by the smiling lady, and after the introduction, "My husband, John Thyréus—Miss Gunnel Ivarsson—Miss Nanna Ivarsson—Siri and Harriett, our little daughters," the family returned with the two young girls in their company.

Gunnel had during the school period grown a trifle paler but was radiant and unchangeably handsome. She was now about to let the equatorial sun do its worst with this health and beauty, even if she must sacrifice life itself in that death-dealing climate. But Gunnel was not of the kind that backed down in the face of difficulties. Nanna had grown considerably, looked healthy, and her slender, youthful figure had acquired a more dignified carriage. When at times she assumed her old-time weary, discontented air, no one who did not know her could see anything pretty in that pale, expressionless face. But if she became interested, which she did very quickly, her face would light up until it shone with animation and intelligence, and in her eyes there would appear a glow that made her almost prettier than her fair sister. It was the beauty of intelligence. With vivid interest she looked about her in her new environment. She saw everything: the city to the right with its spires and palaces, the fortress Kronan and the water reservoir looming up toward the sky, the villas with their leafy parks



to the right—the view overcame her with its enchantment.

“How long may we have you here, you birds of passage?” asked Mrs. Thyréus, when the first demonstrations of joy at the meeting were over.

“In two days I go to England in order to proceed thence to the mission field and my long wished-for life work. I shall have two whole days to spend with my dear Gold Mine.” Gunnel smiled as formerly, but there had come something serious, melancholy, in her sweet smile.

“But, you little poetess—ah yes—rhyming chronicle I should say—I suppose you can stay with us a few weeks.”

“Not more than one week.—You must know it is lonesome in the home-nest since the grown nestlings have flown. I am sorry for Mother and Father—they were so downcast when Gunnel went away. I will soon be home again, but I am so overworked with studies now that I need to take a good rest in order to become quite normal again. Mother promised that she would not be uneasy for a week, provided you do not turn me out to shift for myself.”

“Don’t you worry about that. I’ll have you caged, you little bird of the woods! Listen how the thrush sings yonder! He and you are pretty much alike, I think. I have noticed in a couple of popular periodicals that your wings have begun to grow, and the singing too.”

"Don't start any eulogies, Judith! It isn't becoming to you. Do you know," she whispered, drawing her to the other side of the road, while Gunnel and Mr. Thyréus entertained one another, "there was a time when it beckoned and allured like the quintessence of all earthly joy to gain literary fame and find a place in the firmament where the literary lights of the day shine so brightly? I was really presumptuous enough to think of this as a possibility. Now I know and feel that I shall never rise above a certain height, no matter how I strain my wings, as you call it. And therefore I have only a feeling of wanting to hide from everybody and retire into the shade, as soon as the echo of praise or eulogy of my little rhymes reaches my ears. There is decidedly something unhealthy about all praise, and if it goes beyond the mark it causes disgust—at times of course, for if it were entirely wanting I suppose I would lose my courage."

"Say but you are a vain little creature in all your retirement! Write with the grace that God gives and give Him the glory, then all that is unhealthy from every source will disappear."

"You dear Golden Key, you always find the best way to my heart! Do you know, I don't intend to return to school. Papa has consented to my continuing at college but for one thing I am too old, already nineteen years and then it costs too much, and I don't want my father to have more worry about me than he has already had. I intend

to become a busy country woman and help Mother at home and thus try to take up the mantle after you and Gunnel, if I succeed. I shall nevertheless find time to rhyme. With God and His friendship, His Spirit and Word—there is the healthiest and most refreshing atmosphere for ‘gold keys’ and ‘rhyming chronicles,’ and there my inner self, my real, spiritual ego is best at home.”

“But you don’t intend to give up writing?”

“I neither intend to write or to give up writing—I will let it come when it comes, and thus I will do as you say, write with the grace that God gives and with the object of promoting God’s glory and spreading the fragrance of His knowledge about the country.”

“There comes the street car. Don’t you ladies want to ride now after the long promenade?” asked Mr. Thyréus, turning to the pair engaged in conversation, at the same time wiping the perspiration from his brow.

“Oh no, that would be a pity,” said Nanna briskly. Here are so many pretty things to see for one who has never before seen a big city. I must see the sights to a finish.”

“Papa, we want to ride on the street car—we are so tired,” cried the little girls.

“My poor little chickens! You shall ride.”

“Go with us, Papa! Mama can keep company with Aunt Nanna and Aunt Gunnel.”

"Yes, do that, John," urged the wife, and so, with his little girls he entered the car.

"You look fine since you became a housewife in G. and you look happy," remarked Gunnel, who had not had opportunity to talk much with her friend from the "spook hovel" in Hedeberga.

"So I am, thank God! What helped me to decide the matter was the fact that my husband, who previously trusted his intellectual powers more than God, at last 'took his reason captive under the obedience of Christ.' When we parted at Hedeberga, as I supposed for the last time—you remember I wrote to you about it—I in parting said a few words to him, which God used as a means of rending the rock of unbelief in his soul. And when I at last was convinced that the change in his manner of thought was not a so called 'matrimonial repentance,' but a work of the Spirit of God I had no longer cause to decline his entreaty. And he has not since given me any grounds for suspicion that his character is unreliable."

After a while they arrived at the house of the Thyréus family. And who was there to welcome the visitors if not old Whitis, who still looked quite spry.

The house was not large but of the very best construction and surrounded by a dainty little garden with well arranged beds of flowers, bordered with crimson snails. The rooms were light, airy, and tastefully furnished. Here the resources



of the husband appeared in conjunction with the wife's fine appreciation of what was at once simple and tasty.

A very old man with sparse, gray hair and sunken features sat in one of the rooms and read in a book.

"My old father," introduced Judith with tender emphasis.

After many and long years, during which she had lived in painful uncertainty regarding the fate of her father, she now had the joy of caring for him in his old age. Her husband had for a long time put forth vain efforts to learn whether or not he was still alive, and where. At last he had found traces of him. He, like so many others, had sailed to America, where he had sunk deeper and deeper in wretchedness. An acquaintance of Thyréus accidentally discovered him in a poor house, took him in hand and sent him across the ocean at the expense of the son-in-law. Weary of a life in sin and wretchedness and with mental faculties impaired, the old man had had but one vivid sensation, and that was a fear of death that bordered on despair. But now the conqueror of death had given him peace, and he rejoiced in the fact that he had a Savior and also a daughter to take care of him in his self-inflicted wretchedness and his old age.

"What an enchanting home! And all is your own!" exclaimed Gunnel, when Mr. Thyréus

courteously opened the door to the dining-room, where an inviting supper table awaited the guests.

"Yes, it is our own. The happy owner of a gold mine can well afford to have a house of his own," he replied with a smile.









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